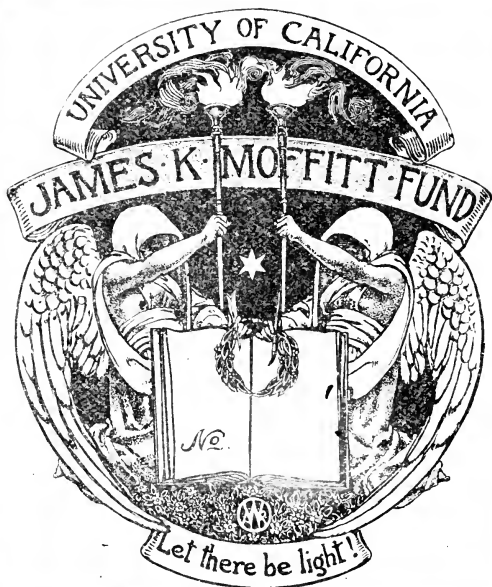


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# HISTORY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

FOUNDER OF THE  
CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION  
(VINCENTIANS)

AND OF THE  
SISTERS OF CHARITY

By MONSEIGNEUR BOUGAUD  
BISHOP OF LAVAL

TRANSLATED FROM THE SECOND FRENCH EDITION BY THE  
REV. JOSEPH BRADY, C.M.

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY HIS EMINENCE  
THE CARDINAL ARCHBISHOP OF WESTMINSTER

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*Apud Mill Hill,*

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## INTRODUCTION.

FATHER BRADY has been well advised in presenting the English-reading public with a translation of Bougaud's Life of Saint Vincent de Paul. A larger and more detailed Life of the saint was published by his contemporary, Abelly, Bishop of Rodez, and there are in addition the volumes of the saint's correspondence, made up of 2,500 letters, out of about 30,000 which were in existence at the time of his death in 1660. These publications form a mine of precious ore, to which Bishop Bougaud is mainly indebted for his facts ; and they will always live as the *pièces justificatives* of the biographer, and the primitive sources to which the devout student and follower of the saint will delight to have recourse. But the Bishop has placed modern society under a signal obligation to his labours, because knowing intimately the temper and taste of the present generation, he has provided a biography which, both in style and form, is such as people love to read. It is not so short as to be jejune and lifeless, nor is it so minute and long as to weary those who are not devoured by a thirst to know everything, even to the smallest details, connected with the history of this great modern saint.

Bishop Bougaud's biographies of Saint Jane Frances de Chantal, of Saint Monica, and of Saint Vincent de Paul, are literary masterpieces, and the translation of this last enriches our English religious literature with a most valuable addition.

But I welcome its publication at the present time for another reason—its opportuneness. A twofold work is before the English-reading Catholics of the world, upon the faithful execution of which must depend the influence they will eventually exert upon society. That work consists in nothing less than a reform of society, and the elevation and sanctification of the priesthood. This is the work before the Church of the present time everywhere, and therefore here. It is a double work, that appeals, or ought to appeal, to every instructed Catholic. It forms the burden of Papal encyclicals, it is the end aimed at by the decrees of Diocesan and Provincial Synods, it is the constant study and labour of bishops.

The seventeenth century no doubt differed vastly from our own, but not to the extent that may be supposed. It forms part of that modern period of which the present day is the outcome. The problems undergoing study and solution are in large measure the same. Among the many saints and great Christian leaders of the Church in the seventeenth century, Saint Vincent de Paul stands out pre-eminent as an apostle of charity and an educator of the clergy. His long life of devotion to the service of his neighbour is a model for our imitation.

The social difficulty with which we are face to face has been created by the substitution of capital as a governing power for Christianity. The working classes, or "the hands," as they have been called, have been treated simply as so much wealth-producing power; and the rich and the poor have been banded into two opposite camps. Luxury, selfishness and power combine and struggle for the mastery. The working classes have silently realised their position. They herd for the most part together; they live as tenants on the land or in the tenements of absentee landlords, whom they seldom or never see. The absence among them is not only of the wealthy landlord, but of the civilising, humanising, Christianising influence of those who by education are refined, cultivated, charitable and religious. The working classes are learning to combine, in order to secure for themselves by pressure and threats that which ought to have been spontaneously offered to them by Christian sentiment. In the long-run, it will be found that the power of capital is a miserably inefficient substitute for Christianity, and that it will be destroyed by the combination of numbers, and by its own corruption, unless there be a return among all classes to Christian principle.

We are witnesses here in England of an extraordinary movement, brought about by a recognition of the fact that there are immense social dangers ahead, and that the rich have duties and the poor rights that cannot be for ever laid aside. Hence there has sprung up a spirit of philanthropy, dispensing money and personal service, which is endeavouring to remedy the evil created by the absence of practical Christianity. It is good, so far as it goes; it is an imitation by the natural man of that which is supernatural and divine; but it cannot be expected to do the work of Christianity, which alone is capable of regenerating and elevating the human race. It is in silent and unconscious league with that naturalism of the day which

affects to raise mankind to a higher level, and to secure the human happiness of society, without recourse to and dependence on doctrines of revelation—grace, humility, the presence of Christ in the soul, the power of sacraments, the influence of prayer, the sanctity of the Christian life, and the close personal relationship which our Divine Redeemer wished to establish between all His true followers.

Saint Vincent de Paul dealt with the whole range of human misery and suffering—from the case of the foundling to that of poverty-stricken old age—from the instruction of children to the care of the insane. He organised women of the highest ranks of society, of the middle class, and even of the lower. He formed them into bands and associations to deal with every form of destitution and suffering. The Ladies of Charity and the Sisters of Charity were the most remarkable among these. "He covered France with schools for the poor, and taught the daughters of the rich and noble to abandon home and pleasure to consecrate themselves to the education of their less fortunate brethren. But even all this was not enough for him, though it was the maximum for the so-called philanthropists. There was one step more, one higher aim, namely, to care, to teach, to guard, the immortal soul, and bring it safely back to Him from whom it came. To feed the body was good, to enlighten the mind was better, but above and before everything else, in the eyes of Saint Vincent de Paul, was to purify, to guard, to save the soul. Even from this height he looked higher still, and saw, clothed in the rags of the poor, the person of his Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. He used to say, 'I must not judge poor people according to their exterior or according as they speak, for often they are far from what they seem. Let us judge them by the light of faith, and we shall see in them the Son of God, who wished to be poor, who in His Passion lost almost the appearance of a man, who appeared a fool to the Gentiles, a stumbling-block to the Jews.'"

Here then is the patron and the model that the upper classes need to place before themselves for imitation in their dealing with the poor. Here is the distinctive work set before Catholic men and women of the upper or cultivated classes. This work, this spirit, is something altogether different to the philanthropy which rules those kindly men and women who are not professedly governed by the Gospel.

We have for many years had the Sisters of Charity at work

in England. But the Ladies of Charity have not yet been popularised. In Manchester they exist, and their work has taken root under the fostering care of Canon Richardson during the last ten or twelve years. There is plenty of material out of which they might be formed in all our large centres of population. In London there are noble bands of ladies doing work which would have rejoiced the heart of Saint Vincent, and doing it absolutely animated and urged on by the spirit, which he used to inspire. The Duchess of Newcastle with her brave companions on Tower Hill ; Lady Margaret Howard's settlement in Mile End ; Lady Edmund Talbot's in the Far East ; Lady Denbigh, Miss Streeter, Miss Kirwan, Miss Elliot, Miss Stafford, Miss Ray, Miss Burke, and a hundred other ladies connected with the Catholic Social Union in other parts of London, are in reality doing the work of the Ladies of Charity. All of these will welcome the Life of Saint Vincent de Paul, who has been universalised by the declaration of the Holy See that he is " the patron of all works of charity."

In addition to the Ladies, we have the Brothers of Saint Vincent de Paul, under their new president, the Marquess of Ripon. These have a similar work before them, and their desire is to walk in the very footsteps of Saint Vincent. The one need is to multiply their numbers. All of these know full well that the reforming of modern society must come from within, that is, by inspiring it with the Divine Spirit, who alone can save it from corruption. Nothing could be happier for the Brothers than to be marshalled in this mission, and encouraged and taught by Saint Vincent de Paul.

I would gladly pursue this theme, but the limits of an Introduction warn me to be brief. There is, however, one other feature of Saint Vincent's mission to the Church on which I will venture to offer an observation, and on account of which I welcome this Life as opportune. He was in his day one of the chief reformers of the clergy ; and remarkable as he was for his deeds of charity, he was none the less remarkable for the care which he devoted to the education and the formation of priests and bishops. Here again his example is specially opportune. The Church in England is deeply solicitous for the training of her clergy. All our efforts, all our expenditure upon Churches, schools and institutions will be as nothing if the priesthood prove not to be at the height of its vocation. There are many dangers that infest us—assimilation to the world, a worldly spirit, love of ease and comfort, a low standard

of conduct. These open the soul to the influence of human passions, and quench the Spirit of God. Neglect of prayer and of mortification, and the substitution of the life of sense and of reason for the life of faith, destroy entirely the savour of the salt. The future of the Catholic Church in England, the whole progress of religion, depends upon no one thing more than upon the apostolic spirit of the priesthood. There is no thought, no aim, no prayer that ought more completely to engross the attention of bishops than the raising of their young clergy to a high intellectual and spiritual standard. It is for this purpose that the English bishops have concentrated their attention upon forming common seminaries, which they desire to place in the immediate charge of men who shall be models of devotedness and self-sacrifice, as well as learned and capable as teachers. This Life of Saint Vincent de Paul will, therefore, be of value to bishops, superiors, and ecclesiastical students, because it contains so much that directly concerns the training and mission of the priesthood. It will be of use also to the devout laity if it incite them also to address frequent and fervent prayer to God for the sanctification of the clergy. *Sicut populus sic Sacerdos*. If the fathers and mothers of families form a high ideal of the priesthood, if they inspire it into their children, if they foster it during the years of the education of their sons, they will render incalculable service to the Church. Indeed it is not too much to say, that it is most desirable that the Catholic laity should exact a high standard of perfection from the clergy, because they will thus form a wholesome and stimulating public opinion that will help to sustain the priesthood in its perfection. Now, from no biography will they better learn what the priesthood ought to be than from the Life of Saint Vincent de Paul.

HERBERT CARDINAL VAUGHAN.

FEAST OF SAINT JOSEPH,  
MILL HILL, 1899.





# PREFACE

## TO THE FRENCH EDITION

BY

MONSEIGNEUR LAGRANGE

BISHOP OF CHARTRES.

MGR. BOUGAUD, late Bishop of Laval, a see, alas ! occupied by him too short a time, is undoubtedly a great hagiographer, but more especially an apologist. His earlier lives of the saints—Saint Jane Chantal, Saint Monica, and Blessed Margaret Mary—are works of an apostolic character. The lives of saints are written with the view to making saints, or, at least, to cultivating piety and Christian virtue. To Mgr. Bougaud's mind a saint's life was also a vindication of Christianity from its results, according to our Lord's words : " A tree is known by its fruits." The great work, however, which he had always in view, and which he intended to be the principal task of his life, was an apology, properly so-called. That, after many years of labour, he accomplished, and it shall always be regarded as his chief work.

*Christianity and the Present Age* is the title of this vast apology. It consists of five volumes, which appeared one after the other—successive parts of a structure, whose erection was watched with increasing interest, and whose completion was hailed with widespread admiration. Mgr. Bougaud's method is that of our theologians. But what is peculiar to him is his manner of treating dogmatic questions, and of adapting them to the spiritual wants of his contemporaries. The author's art and style enabled him, as when speaking, to touch the heart. For this reason we can say, notwithstanding the great names of our modern apologists, that Mgr. Bougaud's work is in the first rank ; and when a priest nowadays seeks for the most useful book to place in the hands of men of the world to reanimate their faith, he almost always selects *Christianity and the Present Age*.

After completing this dogmatic work, so great that it seemed to put into the shade the hagiographical works of our illustrious author, Mgr. Bougaud did not feel that he ought to lay aside his pen. Naturally a hard worker, he had not been idle during the eighteen years he spent at Orleans with the Bishop,

who perhaps was one of the most laborious men of his time. Reverting then to his original idea of vindicating Christianity by its saints, he looked into that long roll of heroes to find what name he might, with the greatest profit, hold up before the present age, in order to attract and win it. After at first thinking of Saint Louis—a great king as well as a great saint, and a great king because a great saint—he determined, however, upon another name more modern, and which, in truth, more directly appeals to the spirit of the times—Vincent de Paul. He it was who, in the seventeenth century, seems to have been the precursor of the great works, the fulfilment of which the Church regards as her mission in the nineteenth.

The nineteenth century is democratic ; democracy holds the field, as Royer-Collard says. Nowadays to serve the masses is to become a hero. Moreover, the democratic movement has given rise to social questions which present this special danger : that there is a large section of society at present that would fain solve these questions without and against the authority of the Church.

Now Saint Vincent de Paul is peculiarly appropriate to the entire situation. Who was a greater servant of the people than he ? The eighteenth century, that respected nothing, acknowledged this great benefactor of mankind. The stupendous works accomplished by him have unquestionably proved the hollowness of the chimera of our day, which aims at secularising, de-Christianising beneficence itself, and they point to the true source, the true inspiration, and the true genius of charity.

This is the standpoint from which Mgr. Bougaud wrote the saint's life. We feel while reading it that he always addresses himself to the men and women of his own time. He had a presentiment that it was to be his last effort, and he wished it to be his parting word. It may be said that he put all his talent and all his heart in his work. We recognise an art more beautiful than ever, a restrained ardour that denotes the author's greatest effort, and a tact that reveals the experienced writer and the consummate historian.

The life of Saint Vincent de Paul had already been well studied and often written. Of all the saint's biographers, Abelly, the first in point of time, shall perhaps always remain the first in authority, notwithstanding the many things that are to be desired in his valuable book. Subsequent biographers have each their merit, which it is our intention neither to dispute nor diminish. Mgr. Bougaud, however, the saint's

latest historian, has had this advantage over the others, of being able to sift a large collection of the saint's letters, which were only brought to light within the last few years.

The special value of his work, however, consists less in the new matter which he brings to light than in the manner he narrates a life so well known. Thanks to his art, to his wise and clear arrangement, notwithstanding its innumerable details, the history develops itself with a charming rapidity and clearness that delights one. A quiet and restrained ardour is always felt, which sometimes waxes into an eloquence that moves and fascinates ; in a word, his style is at once dignified and literary, graceful and vivid. Hence, perusal of this book produces a deep impression. Men of the world, for whom especially it was written, believers or non-believers, will not lay it down without feeling that they have contemplated in Saint Vincent de Paul, and in almost superhuman proportions, a great man and a great saint.

Such is the work which worthily crowns the labours of Mgr. Bougaud. He has bequeathed it to us, we cannot say unfinished, since he has brought us as far as the canonisation of the saint, having himself revised and corrected the work with the greatest care. Death, we cannot too deeply regret, prevented him from publishing it.

An old and cherished friendship has merited that honour for us. We feel bound to bring out the work exactly as he left it. However, since the publication of the first edition, the author's chapter on the virtues of Saint Vincent has been found, and hence we substitute it for that which was taken from Abelly. Moreover, at the suggestion of some friends, many corrections have been made in this edition, which undoubtedly Mgr. Bougaud should have made himself had he lived. Again, a new jewel was added to the already brilliant aureola of Saint Vincent de Paul when Leo XIII. proclaimed him Patron of Works of Charity. How that glorious title was petitioned and obtained, could not but add interest to the biography, and this, together with a few details on the translation of the saint's relics, are all that we have added to Mgr. Bougaud's work.

We confidently present it to the public, who will find in it, in all their brilliancy, the noble qualities of the illustrious writer. Speak again, cherished friend, through the pages of your book to this age, that has become your willing audience.  
*Defunctus adhuc loquitur.*



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# HISTORY OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL.

## BOOK I.

### GOD PREPARES SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL FOR HIS GREAT MISSION.

#### CHAPTER I.

BIRTH—PRIMARY EDUCATION—ORDINATION.

1576—1600.

IN the early years of the seventeenth century a priest might be seen frequently walking through the streets of Paris. Those who met him, not knowing who he was, did not pay him the slightest attention. His coarse clothes, his patched soutane, his very figure, which at first sight seemed ordinary, denoted one of those devoted priests that are passed unnoticed. His name was in keeping with his dress, he was simply called Mr. Vincent.

If the passer-by had examined his countenance more closely, he should have observed an indescribable expression of rare humility, simplicity, and kindness; but the world is incapable of such insight, and even this was not enough to reveal to it the prodigy before it.

In truth, that humble priest was undoubtedly one of the most extraordinary characters that the seventeenth century had witnessed—a century, too, so fruitful in great geniuses and great saints. He was one of those men of whom antiquity had not even dreamed, and of whom Christianity itself has produced but a few. Scarcely dead, the Church raised him on her altars, and the world adopted his name and made it a synonym for charity. The philosophy that rails at everything holy pardoned him for being a Christian, and was charmed at reading his history. The Revolution itself, stained with the blood of

murdered priests, erected a statue to him ; and when at length the nineteenth century dawned, it saluted him with a chorus of admiration that eclipsed all previous praise.

What brought about all this ? By what charm has the humble priest been able to arouse around his tomb so deep and universal an enthusiasm ? What has he done for souls and society, that voices usually so discordant should chorus his praise ? This is what we are about to see, if God enables us to paint for our contemporaries the true character of St. Vincent de Paul.

He was born on Easter Tuesday, April 24, 1576, in Pouy, a little village of seven to eight hundred inhabitants, not far from Dax, in the Landes department. A heavy cloud envelops the circumstances of the birth of this great saint. We scarcely know his father's full name. According to Abelly it was Jean de Paul ; but according to Collet, Guillaume de Paul ; and letters at the time of the saint's ordination leave a blank for his father's Christian name, clearly showing that there was a doubt on the point even at Tarbes. His mother's name was Bertrande de Moras. Neither of his parents was of noble birth, as is sometimes thought, and as some have endeavoured to establish. They were poor country people, with no pretensions to nobility, as Saint Vincent himself was so fond of recalling.

His father, low-sized, lame, somewhat keen and shrewd, as peasants usually are, was an excellent Christian and straightforward man. His mother was a pious woman, and some circumstances would lead us to think she was of a better family than her husband, but there is little certainty. One day an old woman, thinking the more easily to obtain an alms, said to the saint that she had been a servant with his mother. " O my good woman," said he, " you make a mistake ; my mother never had a servant, she did everything herself, for she was the wife of a poor peasant, and I am his son." This is all we know about her. Her joy when God blessed her marriage with six children, how she reared them in piety, whether she petted her third son, Vincent, who was to become so great a saint—all these sweet memories, noted with such care in many of the lives of the saints, will not be found here nor in any part of this great life, for more than half is lost in shade.

The unpretentious house where these two pious Christians lived, and where our saint was born, is still to be seen. It was built like all the peasants' houses of the country, of heavy oak beams, bedded in clay mixed with straw. The house was pretty large, containing a ground floor and five apartments, together

with the barns. We enter at once by a rather heavy oak door, into the first apartment. A high chimney-piece in dark wood was at the end, and a small window in front and on one side. The ceiling was of oak, and the floor earthen. This apartment served alike for kitchen, dining-room, sitting-room, and reception-room, and two other rooms opened off it on the left. The first was the parents' room, in which Saint Vincent was born ; the other was a room destined for the eldest son when he married. This was the first and principal portion of the house. Behind were two rooms, one the sons' bedroom, and the other, on the right, the daughters'. The first opened on the garden, and by a staircase led into the large granaries. The daughters' room was nearer, and had no door leading out, so that they could neither come in nor go out, except under the parents' eyes as they passed through the sitting-room. The roof was of brick, and shaped so as to allow the rain to fall to the right and left. The stables were outside ; at the back were those for the sheep and swine, while beside the kitchen were the cattle. A little opening in the wall kept them in sight, and afforded a ready means of passing on a slide some of their food. Similar arrangements were in all the farm-houses. The cattle were the peasant's support, and of these he was proudest and most careful. Ten or twelve acres were attached to the house, and this composed Jean de Paul's holding. It was known, I cannot say why, as, Ranquines, and gave its name to the whole village, perhaps because it was the largest and best kept. Unquestionably they were not well off, especially as six children had to be provided for ; but neither were they in want, as we might be inclined to infer from the saint's extreme humility. It is among such lives of toil, regularity, economy, and sobriety, that good morals are maintained, and great souls often reared.

The chosen infant was baptised the very day he was born. Notwithstanding its distance, his pious mother wished him to be brought to their poor dilapidated parish church at Pouy, still to be seen full of the relics of Saint Vincent de Paul. To the left of the entrance, battered and disfigured by time, is a poor wrought iron font fitted in the wall, and here the saint was baptised. Around are the seats from which for twelve years he listened to his first lessons in catechism, and above is the altar at which he made his first communion. This altar having fallen asunder, it was replaced by another ; but the venerable reredos representing St. Peter kneeling at the feet of our Lord and receiving the keys, is preserved and attached to the wall. At

the other end rises the cemetery, where repose, forgotten save by God, the parents who gave to the world and to the Church Saint Vincent de Paul. Around is an immense plain studded with flocks, where many a time the youthful saint wandered.

There were no servants in Jean de Paul's house, the parents doing everything, assisted by their children. Some helped their father at the plough, and the others led the flocks out to graze. When St. Vincent was old enough he was put to the latter work, and remained at it for many a year, during which he began to manifest virtues seldom found in young persons. In the middle of this marshy plain, shaded by old oak trees, and watered by a pond, where his flock used to graze, there was one spot dear to his piety and his heart. This was the ruins of an old chapel dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, and the object of an ancient holy pilgrimage. Six years before the saint's birth (1570), the Calvinists had burnt this chapel, and in order to save the statue from the indignities of the heretics, the people hid it in the pond. Nothing remained then but the debris of the burning; but this was doubly sacred, from the veneration and love of the people, and from the outrages of the heretics. Here might often be seen the young saint kneeling in prayer, and here it was he first manifested that ardent love of the Blessed Virgin which never left him.

In this place also there is another witness to his youthful piety. In front of the house was an aged oak, even at the time of his birth many centuries old, and at present, after more than three hundred years, still spreading its magnificent branches. But even in 1576 time had eaten away the trunk, and the child utilised this cavity to place in it a statue of the Blessed Virgin, around which he loved to twine wild flowers. Many an hour he spent before it as he tended his flock. What sighs, what prayers ascended to heaven from under those branches, whose very leaves Catholic piety has for three centuries carried as relics all over the world!

But let us finish tracing the spots where our saint spent his youth. The plain rose somewhat towards the south, showing in the distance the ruins of the old castle of Montgalliard. One day the Bishop of Saint-Pons, who was born there, alluded to it as his home. "Oh! I know it well," promptly replied the humble priest, "I often brought my flocks in that direction."

What, perhaps, was more striking in such tender years than his piety was his charity. When a child he used to give everything away, without keeping anything for himself. In the

mornings, going along the road with his knapsack filled for the day, he hastened to share his allowance with those who were worse off. If his father sent him for flour, and if he met some poor person, he took down his bag and gave him a handful, which did not displease his father, who was a good-natured man. Another time for doing little services, he had saved up thirty sous—quite a fortune even at the present for a peasant's child; but how much more then, when money was so valuable, and represented, perhaps, the child's savings for more than a year. Some poor wretch chanced to turn up, and the child did not hesitate, but gave him all he had.

Thus he grew up till he was twelve (1588), and like his piety and charity, his mind was developing, so it was determined to send him away to school. Had he already made his first communion? Was it the manner in which he learned the catechism, that suggested to the good priest of Pouy the idea of sending him away? With what faith and devotion he approached the holy table? Was it thought a pity to allow such a child to remain tending cattle? All this is probable, but history is silent. The Franciscans had a small college at Dax, where for sixty livres a year they educated young boys. It is said that the child's father, in taking this important step of sending him to college, was not free from human motives. There was near him, perhaps at Dax, a man of the same standing as himself, whose son having become a priest, a religious and prior of his monastery, had succeeded by his talent and influence in amassing great wealth, which he spent on his family. Why could not little Vincent do as much? He was highly gifted, and the sacrifices they should make now, would be rewarded a hundred-fold later on. But though a grain of human motives was mingled with the consent which the father gave to his son's vocation, yet he had a higher aim too. "He will make a good priest," said he, "for he has a tender heart."

Thus our young saint entered the college at Dax in 1588, at the age of twelve, and remained till he was sixteen. We know nothing of these four years, except that he even surpassed in virtue as well as in talent the hopes that were entertained of him. In this virtue there was just one slight stain, that nobody knew, nor should we believe it had he not revealed it himself. It is strange that the man who was to be such a prodigy of humility, that it is questionable whether his humility surpassed his charity, should blush among the children of the rich, on account of the lowliness of his parents. "I remember," said

he, "that one time when at college, being told that my father, who was only a poor peasant, was waiting for me, I refused to see him, which was a great sin." "I believe," adds Mme. Lamoignon, "the greatest sin he ever committed." Another day, addressing his confrères, he said: "Alas, gentlemen, whom do you obey? You obey one, who like the Scribes and Pharisees, is full of vice and sin, but this will render your obedience the more meritorious. I often recall to mind that when I was a little boy, brought to town by my father, I was ashamed to be seen with him or to acknowledge him, because he was poorly dressed and a little lame. Oh, wretch, how disobedient I have been! I ask God's pardon for that, and all the scandal I have given, and beg the prayers of the little company, that God may forgive me and grant me true contrition."

This is the first time we hear Saint Vincent speaking, and we should remark his tone.

There was at this time in Dax a lawyer, M. de Commet, who was looked up to, on account of his birth, means and talent, and he had two sons at college with our saint. Being a magistrate in Pouy, he did not mix with the parents of the saint, of whose success the Franciscans had told him. It occurred to M. de Commet to take the young student into his own house, and have him as tutor for his two sons. He would accompany them to school, which would not prevent him from studying on his own account, and thus he would relieve his parents of the large amount which they had spent on him for the last four years. We must stop here to pay a grateful tribute to this provincial lawyer. His name is all that we know, for there is no account of his life. He has had an immense influence on the interests of the Church, inasmuch as he not only retained Saint Vincent for two years, but having carefully observed him, he became convinced that such a character should not remain in the world, and urged him to turn his attention to the ecclesiastical state. At first the humble young man was startled at the thought, and resisted it, but he had the greatest confidence in M. de Commet, who was a virtuous man, and whom he regarded as a second father. His professors in Dax being of the same opinion as M. de Commet, Saint Vincent, with the permission of the Chapter of Dax, the See being vacant, received tonsure, and the four minor orders from Mgr. Diharse, Bishop of Tarbes, in the collegiate church of Bidache, on December 20, 1596.<sup>1</sup> He was at this time twenty years, seven months, and twenty-three days.

<sup>1</sup> Collet, according to Abelly, Sept. 19.

Having taken this important step and received tonsure, it was now necessary to determine in what university the young Vincent de Paul should study theology. There were two celebrated universities near Dax—Saragossa in Spain, and Toulouse in France. Why was Saragossa thought of? The fact is, that it was so esteemed that Saint Vincent went there ; but, we know not why, he remained only a short time, returning to Toulouse, where he spent seven years. To defray so much expense, his father sold a pair of oxen, and not unlikely M. de Commet, who, as we shall see, watched over the future of our saint with such tenderness, added something also. Thus he was enabled to make his first theological studies. When the vacation of 1598 came round, his resources were exhausted, and not wishing to burden either his father or his kind friend, Saint Vincent did what our poorer students do nowadays—he obtained a tutorship. He secured one at the castle of Buzet, in the little town of the same name, about five leagues from Toulouse. The lord, Hebrard de Grossoles, had two very young sons, Renaud and Jean. After confiding them to Saint Vincent for the vacation, he was so impressed with his piety, talent and influence, that when the vacation was over he and his good wife, preferring to be separated for a time from their children, than that the latter should lose so holy a guardian, determined that they should continue their studies and return with Saint Vincent to Toulouse. The saint attended the university lectures while his young pupils were at school, and during the intervals he helped them at their lessons. Others were not slow to join them, and among them were two grand nephews of the heroic Jean de la Valette, Grand Master of the Order of Saint John of Jerusalem, who had successfully defended Malta against the entire forces of Soliman, and thus preserved the honour and peace of Christian Europe. The Duke of Epemon, a near relative of those two young noblemen, was so struck with the saint's prudent and devoted care, that he expressed his profound admiration, and for many years regretted not having procured a bishopric for him.<sup>1</sup>

It was amidst this little world, of which he was at once the father and master, that the young saint prosecuted, and after seven years completed, his theological studies. He successfully obtained his bachelorship in theology, professorship of Peter Lombard's second book, and the *Gallia Christiana*<sup>2</sup> gives him

<sup>1</sup> Collet.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. ii., p. 1403.

the title of doctor of theology. We are assured of his bachelorship, and of the commission to explain the Master of the Sentences ; but his certificate of doctor of theology has not been discovered, and many think his humility made him destroy it. Whatever he was, it is computed, says Abelly, that he spent more than sixteen years studying at Dax, and at the University of Toulouse. Years afterwards the Jansenists, distorting some expressions of the saint, made through humility, to the effect that he was a scholar of the fourth form, endeavoured to establish his ignorance ; but those who have read his two thousand letters will no longer doubt the depth and extent of the saint's theological learning.

While surrounded by his dear pupils, who defrayed his university expenses, Saint Vincent received holy orders. He was made sub-deacon on September 19, 1598,<sup>1</sup> and deacon three months afterwards, December 19, in the Cathedral of Tarbes, by Mgr. Diharse. His dimissorial letter for the subdiaconate was signed by Guillaume de Massiot, Vicar-General of Tarbes, the See being vacant at the time, and bears date, September 10, 1598. For the diaconate, however, it was dated December 11, and signed by the same, but in the name of Jean-Jacques du Salt, Bishop-Elect of Dax. Now that he had received holy orders, nothing further remained but to prepare for the priesthood. The year 1599 was destined to see him ascend the altar, and already Mgr. Salt had sent the letters to that effect. The saint looked forward to this event with anxious fear. He trembled to think that his hands should touch the adorable body of our Lord, and to satisfy his humility and fervour, his ordination was postponed for a year.

It was during this interval that his father died. He never ceased to entertain great hopes of his son, and although he was not well off, and left a wife and five children, yet, by his will, dated February 7, 1598, he wished that every sacrifice should be made for Saint Vincent's studies, and made special provisions in his favour. But the humble and pious youth refused them all, deeming his pupils sufficient, and only feeling too happy to leave to his mother and brothers his father's modest heritage.

It was towards the end of the following year, September 23, 1600, that Saint Vincent received the priesthood. He was ordained by Mgr. François de Bourdeille, Bishop of Périguez, in his own private chapel at Saint Julien, now known as

<sup>1</sup> Not February 27, as Abelly says.



Château-l'Évêque. This chapel is still to be seen, and an annual pilgrimage commemorates the event.

We might have thought that having been ordained at Château-l'Évêque, Saint Vincent would have said his first mass there. But his old and cherished Buzet claimed him. It may be that M. and Mme. de Grossoles and their two children had assisted at his ordination, and urged him to come to Buzet, in order to have the happiness of hearing his first mass. However, they could not succeed in gaining him over. About twenty minutes' walk from Buzet, situated on the mountain top, and hidden in the wood, was an old church dedicated to the Blessed Virgin. How often had he visited this spot ! Tradition points out the path he used to tread, and it was there he chose to say his first mass. Afterwards he would admit the people, but at his first mass he must be alone, absolutely alone, with the priest and server, as the rubrics prescribe. "We have heard it said," writes Abelly, "that he had such an idea of the greatness of this Divine action, that he trembled, and not having the courage to celebrate publicly, he preferred to say it in a retired chapel, assisted merely by the priest and server." Long afterwards, in the peasants' cottages, might be seen an old picture representing the saint's first mass, and written at the bottom was : "Saint Vincent de Paul said his first mass in the chapel of the Blessed Virgin beyond Tarn, situated in the wood on the mountain-top. He chose this place in order to offer the adorable sacrifice with less distraction and with the deepest recollection, having, as is customary, an assistant priest and server."

But what neither pen nor pencil can describe are the sentiments which animated him, whom Saint Francis de Sales regarded "as the holiest priest of his time." He was enraptured to think of the greatness of the priesthood. That a man, a simple and poor man like him, was empowered to bring down from heaven and place Jesus Christ on our altars by a few words from his unworthy lips, excited in him an amazement so great, that it completely overcame him. He never ceased saying during the remainder of his life, that had he realised what it was to be a priest, he would have preferred tilling the ground than to undertake so holy an office. During the sixty years he was a priest he never departed from these sentiments of his first mass, or rather, year by year his fervour increased.

## CHAPTER II.

ST. VINCENT'S CAPTIVITY IN TUNIS—HIS VISIT TO ROME—  
HE IS SENT WITH PRIVATE LETTERS TO HENRY IV.

1600—1609.

FIVE years after his ordination Saint Vincent was suddenly torn away from the peaceful retired life he had hitherto led, and subjected to a series of extraordinary adventures that resemble a romance. At first sold as a slave in the market place of Tunis, brought away into the heart of the desert, he was deprived of all spiritual aid, and even of the happiness of saying mass for two years (1605-1607). Then escaping from Tunis with his master, whom he had converted, and crossing to Aigues-Mortes, he went to Avignon. He is next presented to Mgr. Pierre Montorio, Papal Nuncio, who, becoming attached to him, brought him to Rome, where he remained fifteen months. From Rome he is sent to Henry IV., with private messages not to be risked in a letter. He is received by that great King, and then just at the moment when he seemed to touch the highest honours, he quietly disappears into a small parish in the suburbs of Paris. These are facts which we should hardly credit, were they not related by Saint Vincent himself. And in what a style ! Vivid, original, picturesque, but with a strange peculiarity of expression which shows that if he had made brilliant studies, it was at a distance from Paris, in the heart of the Landes, where the language was at least twenty-five years behind the time, not only compared with that spoken at court, but in Burgundy and Savoy. But let us go more into detail, in order that we may be better acquainted with the saint.

Immediately after his ordination his protector and friend, M. de Commet, used every endeavour to obtain a living for him near Dax ; for he wished to secure for his own soul, as well as for his wife and children, the guidance of so holy a priest. Saint Vincent was, as a matter of fact, appointed to Thil, a country parish of sixteen hundred souls, situated in the Landes, about two miles from Dax. But this living, rather important for a young priest, being disputed by another candidate who had asked and obtained it from Rome, the saint

preferred renouncing his right to having a lawsuit. By this act of disinterestedness and humility he was again free to continue his studies, and returned to the University of Toulouse (1600-1601). While M. de Commet was endeavouring to obtain a good living for our saint, the Duke of Epemon, whose nephews had been his pupils, had another object in view, viz., to obtain a bishopric for him. The influence of the Duke, the holiness of the young priest, and the custom of the time, rendered this project not improbable, and perhaps it is to this circumstance we may attribute a trip to Bordeaux, which the saint made at this period. He met the Duke of Epemon<sup>1</sup> there; but of that interview, as of the whole journey, he has said nothing except that it cost him a good deal. There was question at least of some important benefice, as the letter we are about to quote implies, in which the saint says that at the very moment "fortune seemed to smile on him, it was then that it showed its fickleness and inconstancy."

On returning to Toulouse, Saint Vincent learned that an old lady of rank and piety had just died, making him her heir. She must have been one of those devoted to the Church, and noticing this young priest so poor and so exceptionally gifted, and even more pious than learned, determined to enable him to prosecute his studies as far as possible. The legacy was not much, consisting merely of some furniture and land, with a bill for four or five hundred crowns due to her by a spendthrift, against whom she had obtained a writ shortly before her death. Trifling though it was, it compensated our saint for the benefice which he had abandoned, afforded him the means of paying his debts, and time to finish his studies. He accepted it then; and as the spendthrift, to evade his debt, had fled to Marseilles, and there engaged in business with wonderful success, the saint resolved to find him and be paid. He relates to M. de Commet, in a most amusing way, how he went to Marseilles to get the money. "You know, sir," he wrote, "how, on my return from Bordeaux, I found that a good old lady in Toulouse had made a will in my favour. The inheritance was valued at four or five hundred crowns, which was to be paid by a spendthrift. I went, by the advice of my best friends, to Toulouse, in order to get a portion of the money and to sell the property. Besides, I wanted the money to pay my debts, and to defray the expenses in pursuing an object I must not mention. On my arrival I found that the debtor had absconded, in consequence of a writ which

<sup>1</sup> Collet.

the old lady had caused to be issued against him, but I was informed he was doing well at Marseilles, and had plenty of means. Under these circumstances my adviser came to the conclusion, and indeed it was a matter of necessity, that I should go to Marseilles ; and that having arrested the debtor, I might be able to get at least two or three hundred crowns. Not having sufficient money to do this, I sold the horse that I had hired in Toulouse, intending to pay on my return, a plan which misfortune also delayed, and I must say it, to my shame, I was thus embarrassed. This should not have occurred had God enabled me to carry out an undertaking which seemed likely to be successful. Thus I set out, found my debtor in Marseilles, had him arrested, and obtained three hundred crowns, with which I was satisfied." We see here a Saint Vincent de Paul that little resembles the one we know.

After this he was preparing to return overland to Toulouse, when a gentleman whom he met suggested going by sea to Narbonne. It was the month of July, the day was splendid, and they should arrive the same evening. A saving of time, of fatigue, and of expense, how could he resist such an opportunity ? "We started under the very best circumstances, and should have arrived safely, had not three Turkish Brigantines, which were coasting along the Gulf of Lyons, watching for vessels coming from the fair of Beaucaire, chased us. The pirates attacked the vessel so fiercely that two or three were killed, and I myself received a wound that reminded me ever afterwards of the fierce encounter."<sup>1</sup>

Not to speak of four or five of their oarsmen, one of the Turkish captains was killed. This enraged them, and their first act was to murder the pilot of our saint's ship. "After attending to our wounds they chained us, and then plundered everything, giving liberty, however, to those who offered no resistance. With their spoil they continued for seven or eight days to make for Barbary, a den of thieves connived at by the Grand Turk. Here we were put up for sale, with a formal declaration to the effect that the capture was made on a Spanish vessel, for otherwise we should have been liberated by the French consul. After confiscating all our clothes, they gave each a pair of trousers, a coat and hat, and then led us on view through the streets of Tunis. Having gone through the town five or six times, with a chain around our necks, they brought us back to the ship, so that the merchants might see who could eat

<sup>1</sup> Chantelauze, p. 20.

well, and who could not, and that our wounds were not mortal. Then we were brought to the market-place, where the merchants were judging, just as if buying horses or cattle, making us open our mouths to see our teeth, feeling our sides, probing our wounds, making us walk, trot, run, raise weights and wrestle, in order to test our strength, besides subjecting us to a thousand other brutalities."<sup>1</sup>

Vincent was first sold to a fisherman ; but as the slightest thing made him sea-sick, he was resold to an old Mussulman apothecary, who for fifty years had been mixing metals and seeking the philosopher's stone. The saint relates some curious experiences. "I have often seen him melt equal quantities of gold and silver, then mixing them with powder in the bottom of a crucible, place the whole in the fire for twenty-four hours, when the mixture would become all gold. Very often he amalgamated bad with good silver, and sold it for the benefit of the poor. My business was to keep up ten or fifteen furnaces, which, thank God, I made even a pleasure. My master liked me very much and took pleasure in talking to me of alchemy, and even of his religion, making every effort to win me over, promising me great riches and knowledge. God always inspired me with an assurance of my release, through the constant prayers I offered to the Blessed Virgin, and to her intercession I attribute my deliverance."<sup>2</sup>

But the Mussulman's researches how to cure diseases were of greater interest to our saint than these experiments in alchemy, the uselessness of which he clearly saw and often declared afterwards. The Arabs have always been doctors, and have transmitted from generation to generation secret and powerful cures for certain diseases. Our saint's friend and benefactor, M. de Commet, was a victim to the gravel, and Saint Vincent, always grateful, lost no opportunity of consulting his master in order to obtain a recipe. "With the hope and belief of seeing you again, sir, I was constantly asking my master to teach me how to cure the gravel, for I witnessed him working wonders every day. He taught me, and actually made me go through the process of mixing the ingredients. Oh ! how often have I wished that I had been a slave before your brother died, and had learned the secret I am sending you. I firmly believe that, had I known it, he should be alive to-day."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Chantelauze, p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* pp. 22-23.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* p. 23.

Saint Vincent remained almost a year (September 1605 to August 1606) with this good old man, very kind and amiable, whose reputation was so great that Achmet I. summoned him to Constantinople. On his departure he bequeathed our saint to his nephew, who having learned that the French consul, M. de Brèves, had arrived with orders from the Sultan to release all French slaves, hastened to sell him to an Italian renegade from Nice. This man, possessing some land up the country, brought off his purchase outside the consul's jurisdiction. He had three wives, and it is curious to note how God made use of one of them to set His servant free. "One of his three wives was a Turk," writes Saint Vincent, "and she became interested in me. Wishing to understand our mode of life, she came every day to where I was working in the field, and asked me to sing the praises of my God. The remembrance of '*Quomodo cantabimus in terra aliena*,' the song of the children of Israel, captives in Babylon made me, with tears in my eyes, begin the psalm, '*Super flumina Babylonis*.' Then I sang the '*Salve Regina*,' and many other canticles, which gave her very great pleasure. She did not fail to tell her husband in the evening that he had done wrong in abandoning his religion, and of the happiness she felt in listening to me discoursing about God and singing his praises. This pleasure was so great that she believed the paradise of her ancestors, which she hoped to reach one day, was not so grand nor so delightful as the pleasure she experienced while I sang the praises of my God. She became another Caiphas or Balaam's ass by her words to her husband, for the next day he said it would be a great gain if they could return to France, but that in a few days he would remedy matters, so as to give glory to God. These few days turned out to be ten months, during which he held out vain hopes; but he afterwards, however, fulfilled them. We crossed in a little skiff to Aigues-Mortes (June 28), whence we went to Avignon, where in the Church of Saint Peter, the vice-legat publicly received back the penitent renegade, to the great glory of God and the edification of all present."<sup>1</sup>

This vice-legat was a well-informed man, anxious to understand philosophic and scientific discoveries, and particularly those algebraic secrets, as they were then called, of which, it was said, the Arabs were the great possessors. After some interviews with our saint, he was so charmed that he determined

<sup>1</sup> "Letters," vol. i., p. 1.

to detain him and bring him to Rome, whither he was returning. Learning that he was a priest, he desired him to write at once for the letters of his ordination, which were indispensable.

"It could not have occurred, sir,<sup>1</sup> that you and my relatives should have heard such reports of me from my creditors, whom I should have already paid the hundred or hundred and twenty crowns that the debtor gave me, had not my best friends advised me to keep the money till my return from Rome, lest I should require it, although I was travelling with, and under the patronage of M."

It was under these circumstances and for this end that the long letter, from which we quote some choice fragments, was written, and which explains the details into which the saint felt it his duty to enter. It was now two years since he had disappeared. He left for Marseilles in July, 1605, and nothing had been heard of him since. What had become of him? Had he died *en route*? His mother, uncle, brothers, sisters, and all his friends were living in suspense. As soon as he could he had written to his mother; but had the letter reached her? If so, what joy she must have felt on receiving it, in seeing the tender care of Providence, and these miracles of grace! Certainly it was lucky that he told everything in that letter.

In it he dwelt on little but his humiliations and trials. However, fifty years afterwards, when a copy fell into his hands, he thought that he had made too much of his sufferings, and took every means to destroy the letter. In his eighty-fourth year, on the very eve of his death, he made every endeavour to procure and burn it.<sup>2</sup>

The letter of his ordination, which he had asked for, was immediately sent; but as they were not careful in having it signed and authenticated by the Bishop of Dax, it had to be re-written three times before it was in the correct form.

We possess the saint's third letter to M. de Commet, which contains such interesting details that we feel bound to insert it. It is dated, Rome, February 28, 1608. "I am here in Rome continuing my studies, being supported by the vice-legat from Avignon, who honours me with his friendship and desires my advancement, on account of my having shown him some curious things that I learned from the Turk to whom, as I told you, I was sold. Among other things was an attempt at the mirror of Archimedes, an artificial means of making a corpse speak, by which this miserable man deceived the

<sup>1</sup> Letter to M. de Commet. <sup>2</sup> Cf. "Letters," vol. i. p. 1.

people telling them that Mahomet thus made known to him his will. Besides this there were many other things that I taught the legate, of which he was so jealous that he did not like me to meet others, lest I should also teach them. He was anxious to enjoy the sole reputation of knowing these things, which he sometimes exhibited before his Holiness and the Cardinals. His affection and goodness leads me to hope for the means of an honourable retirement by enabling me to have a respectable benefice in France." He adds: "With this in view, it is absolutely necessary to have a copy of the letter of my ordination, signed and sealed by the Bishop of Dax, together with a character, which could be got by a brief inquiry from some of my friends. This is what the vice-legate is every day urging me to obtain. It is on that account I ask you, M., to be so kind as to copy my letter, and get the Bishop of Dax to give his signature on the form inserted, and to send it to me by Father Pontanus. I should have sent you some money, only I feared it would be lost in the letter. This is why I ask you to arrange with my mother about the expense, for I suppose it will cost three or four crowns."<sup>1</sup>

In the process of canonisation the devil's advocate (as he is called who raises objections) dwelt on these two letters as establishing Saint Vincent's belief in alchemy and the occult sciences. But it must be remembered there two sorts of alchemy—one entirely superstitious and bad, and this the saint denounced and severely condemned, even in his two letters. The other is quite natural—the forerunner of modern science, and always worthy of support. Nothing is more beautiful than to witness a man so holy, so absorbed in God, receive the science with such joy. And what is not less admirable is to see our saint making no use of this knowledge, which would have brought him great profit, at a time when he was deeply in debt. And because the period of his slavery showed forth his virtue, he buried it in the most complete forgetfulness, never speaking of it, and only recalling his captivity in Tunis in order to show greater sympathy for victims around him.

During all these negotiations Saint Vincent was in Rome. He stayed with the vice-legate, who maintained him at his own expense, and thus free from all care, he divided his time between prayer and study. In the mornings he visited those sanctuaries, so numerous and touching, which Rome offers to the piety of the faithful, where so many saints have knelt, and still increase

<sup>1</sup> "Letters," vol. i. p. 12.



by their vigils and prayers the august character of those sacred places. "What a consolation it was for me," he writes, "to find myself in that city, the mistress of Christendom, the dwelling of the head of the Church militant, the spot where are the bodies of Saint Peter and Saint Paul, and of so many martyrs and holy personages who in past times have shed their blood and spent their lives for Jesus Christ. How happy I considered myself in walking on the ground so many saints had trodden! it was a consolation that affected me even to tears."<sup>1</sup>

The desire he had for learning not having diminished amidst so many distractions, he continued his theological studies. During the day he regularly assisted at the celebrated lectures of the Dominicans at the Sapienza, and in the evening he met at the vice-legate's all the illustrious men of France and Italy who were then in Rome. Everywhere he attracted attention by his piety, humility, prudence, extraordinary good sense, and that art of speaking and of remaining silent which few possessed more perfectly than he. It is almost certain that he was presented to the Pope, but his great modesty conceals the fact.

About this time Henry IV. was at the zenith of his power, after realising his first project—the pacification of France and the union of its contending parties by the Edict of Nantes. He was now preparing the second part of his programme, to be the crowning of all his glory, namely, the coalition of all the European States, France, England, Holland, Sweden, and Denmark, Catholics and Protestants, against Spain and Austria, whose daring attitude towards France menaced her very existence. This design, taken up by Richelieu and continued by Mazarin, led a century afterwards to the overthrow of Spain and Austria and to the rise of French power. To strengthen the bonds of that delicate alliance, Henry retained ambassadors everywhere, to study the feelings at the different courts, so as to secretly and promptly inform him. He had three in Rome, the chief being M. de Brèves, who had just succeeded Cardinal d'Ossat.<sup>2</sup> I cannot say what transpired, but it was so important, so confidential, that not wishing to trust such a secret to an ordinary courier, they looked about

<sup>1</sup> "Letters."

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Collet, p. 25; Abelly, p. 20. But Abelly is wrong in stating that it was Cardinal d'Ossat who commissioned Saint Vincent. The Cardinal was dead since March 13, 1604.

for a man of the greatest discretion, who could rely on his memory and explain the matter to the King in person. Saint Vincent was chosen, and was commissioned to appear himself before Henry IV. About the beginning of 1609 the saint arrived in Paris, and was many times received by the King. But it is not to so humble and prudent a soul as Saint Vincent that we must go to seek the nature of such interviews. He never allowed a word to escape his lips about these royal audiences.

Assuredly Mgr. Montorio was delighted to see his protégé thus placed on the high-road to distinction. He knew that Henry IV. was a good judge of character, and it must be acknowledged that amid all his levities the King ardently desired good bishops. He left no stone unturned to force M. de Bérulle to accept the mitre, threatening him even with exile if he persisted in his refusal. He returned to the question as many as five times with Saint Francis de Sales, offering him the very best Sees according as they became vacant. We may, therefore, infer a good deal from these interviews of Henry's with Saint Vincent, but nothing, however, came of them. Had the King not time in the heat of the negotiations of 1609, so soon fatally terminated, to appreciate Saint Vincent de Paul? Or rather, had Saint Vincent, who had not refused to bring a despatch, opposed a measure praised by all politicians, to which, however, the saints were less inclined and Saint Vincent himself never liked—a measure to which all his life he offered such opposition that, under Richelieu and Mazarin, it became a danger for him? Whatever it was, he descended, without regret and as unknown as formerly, the staircase of the Louvre, which later on he was to ascend so often and in circumstances so tragic. Since God had now brought him to Paris he resolved to remain there, and took an humble dwelling in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, in the Rue Saints-Pères, near the Hospital of Charity.

### CHAPTER III.

SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL PLACES HIMSELF UNDER THE  
DIRECTION OF M. DE BÉRULLE—WITH HIS ADVICE, HE  
ACCEPTS THE PARISH OF CLICHY

1609-1613.

IT was the proximity of the Hospital of Charity that had really determined Saint Vincent to settle down in the Faubourg Saint-Germain. This hospital had just been completed. It was built two years previously (1607) by Mary de Medicis, in the large gardens that surrounded an old chapel dedicated to Saint Peter. Hence the names Saint-Pierre, Saint-Père, Saints-Pères are still in that quarter. This institution was carried on by some brothers of the Order of Saint John of God, recently founded in Spain, and five years before brought to Paris by Mary de Medicis. As there were only a few brothers they allowed charitable persons to help them, and great lords, noble ladies, priests, and even bishops, had here the honour of visiting and serving the poor. Saint Vincent gladly joined them. Every morning he came to care the sick and dress their wounds, and sitting by their beds he spoke of pious subjects. Always humble and fearing to intrude, he asked the brothers as a favour to permit him to help them in their work. It is said that it was here, in one of the wards, that the humble Vincent came in contact with the holy and already illustrious M. de Bérulle. Hearing of a poor priest who fulfilled the office of an angel of mercy, M. de Bérulle expressed a wish to meet him. They introduced Saint Vincent, embarrassed, blushing, and endeavouring to refuse the honour. The two priests read each other at a glance. Our humble saint at once placed himself under the direction of M. de Bérulle, and thus arose an indissoluble bond between them.

“At that time,” says Bossuet, “Pierre de Bérulle, a truly illustrious and deserving man, occupying a position, to which, I will presume to say, the purple would have added nothing, so exalted was his virtue and learning, was beginning to give to the French Church the purest and highest lights of the Christian priesthood and of the ecclesiastical state.” He was only a year older than Saint Vincent, and was born near Paris, of a family distinguished in legal circles. His mother was a Séguier, who, when a young widow, joined the Carmelites, and led a life of

sanctity as Sister Mary of the Angels. From this difference in their birth arose at once the difference in their training. While our humble saint was guarding his flocks, and later on, while enslaved in the desert of Africa, was practising there virtue only known to heaven, Pierre de Bérulle was growing up with distinction, shining in Paris and at court. Endowed with an angelic innocence, which astonished Henry IV., with boundless piety and humility, he was scarcely twenty-four when he saw at his feet the highest ecclesiastical dignities, but without ever wishing to accept any of them. Henry wished successively to make him Bishop of Laon, Nantes, Luçon, and Archbishop of Lyons, but the deep faith of the humble priest, the yet unformed but commanding consciousness of his true vocation, made him regardless of the best offers. There was not in the Church of France at the time a greater mind. If he had lived twenty-five years later, when the French language had lost its Latin form and thrown off the host of adjectives and present participles that embarrassed it, his beautiful works on the greatness of Jesus Christ would have been popular, and would have remained as celebrated as Bossuet's, a little inferior perhaps to them, but of the same order. He possessed that great orator's sublimity, passion and power of eloquent appeal, to which he added an incomparable sweetness and unction. The illustrious Cardinal Perron said of him: "If you wish to convince heretics, bring them to me; if to convert them, bring them to the Bishop of Geneva; but if to convince and convert them, bring them to M. de Bérulle."<sup>1</sup>

We cannot reckon the noble lords and ladies whom he converted. Priests even came to be directed by him. Père Bourdoise lived near him for about three months, "anxious," says his biographer, "to approach this burning fire and see this prodigy of charity, that he might share in its ardour and light."<sup>2</sup> Père Eudes, the founder of a Congregation of priests devoted to the education of ecclesiastics, came there also for direction; and there, too, shall we see Saint Vincent de Paul. No less a person than Saint Francis de Sales said, that if he could choose to be any one, he should wish to be M. de Bérulle, and would willingly leave his position to enjoy the direction of so great a man. When Saint Vincent met him in the hospital ward, he had just returned from Spain, with the first Carmelites, who were soon to spread over Paris. He was beginning, with the assistance of Mary de Medicis, the Duchess

<sup>1</sup> Mgr. Perraud, *Oratoire*, p. 35.

<sup>2</sup> *Vie de M. Olier*. vol. i. p. 124.

of Longueville and Mme. Acarie, that mother-house of Saint Jacques where the Carmelites settled, to convert and to sanctify the noble ladies of the seventeenth century. While he was establishing this centre of fervour, his ardent zeal was also meditating the plan of a religious Congregation like the Oratory of Saint Philip Neri, destined for the sanctification of the clergy.

Such was the holy director that God had prepared for Saint Vincent de Paul, to guide him amid the doubts of his as yet hidden vocation. How astonishing! that a man destined to accomplish such great things, had not begun any of them at thirty-five. What am I saying? We shall see him cautiously feeling his way up to fifty. M. de Bérulle, "who was one of the most enlightened men of his time," had no difficulty in discerning that Saint Vincent was called to do great things. According to Abelly and Collet, he may even have predicted that God wished him to establish a new Congregation of priests, who should be of great service to the Church.<sup>1</sup> But so far there were only the germs that required years to mature.

While M. de Bérulle was beginning to make known to Saint Vincent what Providence required of him, he was also supporting him amid the trials by which God ordinarily prepares those whom He calls to do great things. Among these trials there were two in particular, more severe than all the others, and more capable of crushing for ever a soul less courageous than our saint's. For reasons of economy, Saint Vincent had shared a room he had taken in the Faubourg Saint-Germain with one of his countrymen named Dulou, a justice of the peace in the canton of Sore. The judge, going out early one morning on business, forgot to close the cabinet where his money was, about four or five hundred francs. He left Saint Vincent in bed, somewhat unwell, and awaiting medicine, which he had been promised. The boy who brought the medicine, looking for a glass in the cabinet, saw the money, and put it in his pocket without saying a word. When the judge returned he was astonished at not finding his purse. He demanded it from Saint Vincent, who said no more than that he neither took it, nor saw it taken. The judge became enraged and drove the saint from the apartment, defaming him everywhere, in the house, in the neighbourhood, as well as among his friends and

<sup>1</sup> In a letter to Clement XI., Père de la Tour, sixth Sup-Gen. of the Oratory, says: "*Berullius, velut futurorum, Deo sic donante, præsciis, instituendæ postmodum sacræ congregationis Missionum auctorem ac fundatorem præsalutavit Vincentium.*"

acquaintances. One day even, when M. de Bérulle had in his house some persons of rank and piety, among whom was our saint, the judge went there and before this select company publicly treated him as a thief. The saint was satisfied with simply replying, "God knows the truth," but he said this with such modesty and sweetness, that it captivated everybody. It was only a long time afterwards<sup>1</sup> that the little boy, arrested for other thefts, confessed this one to the very same judge of Sore. The judge at once wrote to Saint Vincent, asking pardon, and protesting that if he did not send it in writing, he should go to him with a rope round his neck. In the interval the calumny had spread, and for six months our saint lay under this odious accusation.

There is at this period a letter of Saint Vincent's to his mother, the only one we possess. It reveals him as poor, dejected, without position or resources and ready to leave Paris, to return and hide himself in a little village of the Landes. This is the letter :—

"PARIS, *February 17, 1610.*

"The assurance which the curé of Saint Martin has given me of your health has pleased me as much as the sojourn which it is necessary for me to make here, to recover the losses connected with the occasion of my advancement, makes me sad, not to be able to go and render the services which I owe you. I hope with the grace of God that my labours shall be blessed, and that I shall soon be afforded the means of honourably retiring, to employ the remainder of my days with you. I have laid open the state of my affairs to M. de Saint-Martin, who wishes to imitate the benevolence of M. de Commet towards us, and I have asked him to communi cate all to you. I should like very much to know the state of your affairs ; if all my brothers, sisters, relatives, and friends are well ; especially whether my brother Gayon is married, and to whom. Moreover, how is my sister Marie de Paillotte getting on, and is she still with her brother-in-law Bertrand ? As to my other sister, I think she must be comfortable. I wish, too, that my brother would make one of my nephews study ; my misfortunes and the little service which I have been able to render, may have changed his mind, but the present ill-luck may be the forerunner of a bright future. This is all I have to say for the present, except to ask you to convey my humble regards to all my brothers, sisters, relatives, and friends. Praying

<sup>1</sup> Abelly says "many years" ; but St. Vincent himself says "six months."

God for your health and happiness, I am always your humble, obedient, and devoted child."<sup>1</sup>

About this time there occurred an extraordinary event, which had a decisive influence on the life of Saint Vincent de Paul. Doubting and wavering up to this, he at last finds his way. The heroic deed we are about to narrate is as it were, the birth and baptism of the Patron of works of charity. There was then in Paris a doctor in theology, who, after becoming illustrious in public controversies with heretics, a victim probably of his own pride, had experienced a violent temptation against faith. He could no longer say mass, recite his office, nor enter a church; everything that recalled the thought of God only seemed to evoke from him frightful temptations to blasphemy. Moved to compassion at the sight of this poor priest, whom he knew, and after trying all means to cure him, Saint Vincent felt one of those sublime movements of grace of which history furnishes but few examples. He besought God to restore faith to the unhappy priest, offering himself, if necessary, to carry the burden which its victim could no longer bear. His prayer was heard. While light was dawning on the unfortunate priest's mind, while joy and peace were returning to his heart, Saint Vincent was descending into the depth of that abyss of doubts, temptation and darkness, from which he had delivered the priest. Thus he remained for four years<sup>2</sup> in an affliction it is difficult to realise, no longer having the strength to so frequently visit the hospitals, or to become engrossed with works of charity. This is how he was delivered from the trial. One day, more dejected than usual, he fell on his knees and vowed to consecrate his life to Jesus Christ in the person of the poor. He had no sooner pronounced these words than his sufferings vanished and peace returned. He has himself declared that from that day he seemed to see the truths of faith in the purest light.

It was during this trial that Saint Vincent resolved to lodge with M. de Bérulle and the priests who were founding the Oratory. Not that he had the remotest idea of joining them, for he often declared he never thought of it, and besides, M. de Bérulle saw he had another vocation. His intention in withdrawing to the Oratory was to be nearer him whom he called "his visible angel," and of whom he never had greater need than since the beginning of his great temptation against faith. At the same time, here he found peace, silence, and that detachment

<sup>1</sup> "Letters," vol. i. p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Collet, p. 27.

from the world which he had vainly sought elsewhere. Poor, in need of a benefice in order to live, he had found a home, but even still he felt he was not satisfied.

He was now appointed chaplain to Queen Margaret, the separated spouse of Henry IV. How did he obtain such a post? Probably through the intervention of a friend, M. du Fresne, secretary of that princess, who, having made our saint's acquaintance, and "finding him humble, charitable and prudent, of marvellous discretion, doing good to all," became attached to him and recommended him to the Queen. She wished to see him, and subsequently made him her chaplain. But what a position for a man like our saint! Margaret, grand-daughter of Francis I., daughter of Henry II., sister of the last three Valois kings—Francis II., Charles IX., and Henry III.—of renowned beauty, lively and delicate temperament, had been married against her will and in spite of all protestations, to Henry of Navarre, afterwards Henry IV. An odious union, which neither one nor the other took seriously, which left them as divided and, alas! as thoughtless as before, and which resulted in both asking the Pope for an annulment. This was given in 1599, after a full trial in Rome, in which two diriment impediments were clearly proved, viz., want of consent, and consanguinity in the third degree. Some years afterwards, in 1605, Queen Margaret—for so she continued to be called—returned to Paris. Separated now from Henry, but on the most friendly terms with him, he called her "his sister," and she called him "her brother and her king." She lived in her beautiful palace in the Rue de Seine, the magnificent gardens of which stretched to the river, and while endeavouring to be devout, she continued to mix in a court half pagan in its religion, literature, art and diplomacy. Although Saint Vincent did not reside in the palace, and never appeared at court except in discharge of his office, the dissipation that surrounded him was burdensome, and contributed not a little to his desire of seeking in the company of M. de Bérulle and his first companions an abode more congenial to his tastes. The house they occupied was a short distance from the palace, which enabled him to go there without resigning his office of chaplain, which was necessary for his livelihood. We presume he went there in March or April, 1610, for he remained two years, till May 2, 1612, the date of his instalment in Clichy, and thus there is no doubt that he was living with M. de Bérulle and his companions at the time of the solemn foundation of the Oratory.



This ceremony took place on November 11, 1610, the Feast of Saint Martin, in a house in the Faubourg Saint-Jacques, known as the house of the Petit-Bourbon. Only five priests had joined M. de Bérulle. The morning was passed at the foot of the altar. At the mass offered by M. de Bérulle, the Marchioness of Meignelais, who had given 50,000 livres, M. and Mme. Marillac, Mme. d'Autry, and Mme. Aearie went to holy communion. In the evening Mary de Medicis and Louis XIII. assisted at the office. Cardinal de Joyeuse was there also, as well as many bishops and such a large number of people that it was impossible to close the doors till night. Saint Vincent was certainly in the assembly, but no mention is made of him.

The six priests who composed the rising Congregation were, besides M. de Bérulle, two doctors of the Sorbonne, MM. Jean Bence and Jacques Gastaud; Paul Métézeau, a bachelor of theology; two curés, Pierre Caron, who had left Beaumont, and François Bourgoing, who was anxious to resign Clichy. The last-mentioned, whose funeral oration Bossuet preached, calling him "a Christian of the primitive type," "a true priest of Jesus Christ," was determined to confide his parish only to a priest that was pious, zealous and able to continue the good works which he had begun. For many months he was seeking such a priest, when M. de Bérulle suddenly thought of proposing Saint Vincent.

It would seem that our saint deserved better than the little parish of Clichy, hidden in a suburb of Paris. He had now been more than two years chaplain-in-ordinary to Queen Margaret, and through her had got the Abbey of Saint-Léonard-de-la-Chaume of the Order of Cîteaux, in the diocese of Saintes. These were presages of other favours, and he had only to wait and allow time to do the work. But M. de Bérulle, who thoroughly understood our saint, had far other thoughts. What were these empty titles to a soul like Saint Vincent's, who only thought of the poor?—merely vain play-toys, that not even afforded an opportunity of doing good. On the other hand, M. de Bérulle believed that it was in this part of the country that our saint was called to do great things. Clichy offered an excellent opportunity and would serve as a trial. He proposed it to Saint Vincent, who humbly submitted to his director, but without concealing his repugnance. Not that the parish was too small, but he regarded the charge as too onerous. He preferred to love and serve the poor, and hesitated to undertake

the care of souls. As to Père Bourgoing, he was delighted. This truly venerable man, after M. de Bérulle and Père de Condren, the third Superior-General of the Oratory (a priest, says Bossuet, by his zeal, his gravity and the innocence of his life), had thus the consolation on entering the Oratory of leaving his dear parish in the holiest hands he might wish for. Saint Vincent was installed in Clichy on May 2, 1612. We possess the formal document. "In the afternoon of May 2, 1612, he appeared at the door of the church, and presenting the resignation approved by Rome, demanded from Thomas Gallot, Père Bourgoing's deputy, entrance into the church. Having been admitted, he took the holy water, sprinkled it around, knelt before the crucifix and at the foot of the high altar, kissed the altar, the missal, the tabernacle containing the Blessed Sacrament, and then the baptismal font, seated himself in the curé's place in choir, rang the bells—in a word, observed all the ceremonies used on these occasions. Afterwards he went in and came out of the presbytery. Then, according to royal edict, the deputy, in a loud and clear voice, proclaimed the taking possession, and nobody objecting, he handed the act of instalment to Saint Vincent."

Scarcely installed, Saint Vincent began to visit his parish, composed merely of peasants, but peasants full of faith, of great simplicity and purity of manners. A Jesuit preaching in presence of Saint Vincent, exclaimed in rapture "that all his parishioners lived like angels." Here and there might be seen a country residence of some rich family from Paris, but these were the exception. The poor were many and in want of everything. Saint Vincent served them with his own hands, bringing them money and clothes. He gave them his whole heart, and it was the happiest time of his life. Twenty years afterwards he spoke of it with emotion. "Ah," he would say to himself, "how happy you are to have such good people! The Pope is not so happy. One day the first Cardinal de Retz said to me, 'How are you, sir?' I replied, 'I cannot tell you how happy I am.'—'Why?' inquired the Cardinal. 'Because my parishioners are so good and obedient to everything I tell them, that I say to myself, neither the Pope nor your Eminence is so happy.'"

His church falling into ruins, he determined to rebuild it, although the people were poor and he had nothing. But he was at the gates of Paris, and already he had there sufficient protectors and friends not to allow him to despair of such an

undertaking. As a matter of fact, he rebuilt the church in less than a year, and this is the church that is to be seen to-day in that large and populous district. There is little change—the pulpit from which he preached is still preserved ; in front, on the wall, is the crucifix he used, according to the custom of the time ; and in the garden is a tree brought from Judea, which tradition says was planted by the saint.<sup>1</sup>

Now that the church was restored, he began his labours, and the first thing was to establish monthly communion. Imagine a parish of which almost all the people would be faithful to such an exercise ! “ Oh,” said Saint Vincent, “ how good are the people of Clichy ! After recommending confession and communion on the first Sunday of the month, to my great joy nobody was absent.” He added to this the association of the Rosary, a devotion so grand in itself, but so necessary in a parish where scarcely any one could read or write. At the same time he laid the foundation of an important work in another direction, by gathering around him a certain number of youths, forming them in piety and preparing them to discharge later on some ecclesiastical functions. Already he had twelve in his own house, and some of them became holy priests. Many other plans were in his mind, when suddenly he received a letter from M. de Bérulle, his director and counsellor, which pointed to another sphere of labour. At the sight of so much good accomplished in a single year, did M. de Bérulle think it a loss to retain such a man in so narrow a field of work ? Would it not be better that, instead of saving a few hundred peasants, Saint Vincent should live in some illustrious family like that of De Gondi, one of the highest in the kingdom, which periodically gave forth cardinals, bishops and ministers, who, if penetrated with the Spirit of God by so holy a man, could do so much good in Church and State ? M. de Bérulle thought so, and did not hesitate. Saint Vincent hesitated still less. On receiving word from his holy director he placed his scanty furniture in a waggon, and accompanied it on foot to M. de Bérulle. But obedience does not stifle regret. “ I left with sorrow my little church,” he wrote to a friend. “ My eyes were bathed in tears, and I blessed the men and women who came to see me off, and whom I loved so much. My poor were there too, and that broke my heart. On arriving in Paris with my little furniture I went straight to M. de Bérulle.” In a single year our saint had won all hearts.

<sup>1</sup> Maynard.

## CHAPTER IV.

### FIRST SOJOURN OF SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL IN THE FAMILY OF DE GONDI.

1613-1617.

THE De Gondi family was one of the most distinguished at the time Saint Vincent entered it. Besides their beautiful houses in Paris, they had seats at Montmirail, Joigny, Folleville, Dampierre and Villepreux. Spread over these vast estates were at least seven or eight thousand souls, whom Mme. de Gondi called her subjects. Altogether, in these establishments there was value from 1,500,000 to 1,8000,000 livres, an enormous sum at the time, and besides that a revenue of at least 100,000 livres.

This family, originally from Florence, had grown in importance with each generation, and reached the zenith of its influence during the reigns of Henry III. and Henry IV., in the persons of Albert de Gondi and his brother Pierre, the former filling the highest offices in the State, and the latter the highest in the Church. Albert de Gondi, Marquis of Belle-Isle, Peer and Marshal of France, combined Italian finesse with an administrative capacity which gave him a foremost place in the councils of State; and his valour, born of his French spirit, made him a prominent figure on the battlefields of the time. In politics a Machiavelli, he acted more through worldly than through religious motives. Thus it was in the case of Saint Barthélemy, where without hesitation he sacrificed Henry of Navarre and Condé. Not being able to gain his point, because of the opposition of the illustrious Keeper of the Seals, De Tavannes, and recognizing that the fortunes of Henry of Navarre were beginning to improve, with his Italian astuteness he joined the other side, counselling Henry III. to be reconciled to Henry of Navarre, and thus by attaching himself to the latter, gained more honours and offices than under the former. He died April 21, 1602, and it was with his son, Philippe-Emmanuel de Gondi, of whom we are about to speak, that Saint Vincent now came into contact.

While Albert De Gondi was thus distinguishing himself in the State, his brother Pierre had a no less brilliant career in the Church. He was rapidly made Bishop of Langres in 1565, with the title and rank of a peer, then Bishop of Paris in 1570, Confessor

of Charles IX., Chaplain to Queen Elizabeth of Austria, President of the Council, Commander of the Order of the Holy Spirit in 1578, and finally Cardinal in 1587. All Church matters passed through his hands, and he transacted them with the greatest adroitness, perhaps too much so, during the pontificates of Gregory XIII., Sixtus V., and Clement VIII. He was still living when Saint Vincent entered the family of his nephew, Philippe-Emmanuel. Old and worn out with infirmities, he appointed as his coadjutor, in 1598, the brother of Philippe-Emmanuel, Henri de Gondi, who at the time was hardly twenty-six, and destined, like his uncle, to become Cardinal. It is difficult not to recognise the influence of Saint Vincent on this young prelate; who by degrees withdrew from political life to entirely devote himself and his princely fortune towards the maintenance of the religious foundations of the seventeenth century. Just as his uncle had chosen him, so too he, in his turn, selected as his coadjutor his own brother, Jean François de Gondi, at first a Capuchin, then Dean of Notre-Dame, and ultimately Archbishop of Paris. Here again, Jean François chose as his coadjutor, in 1642, his nephew, the son of Philippe-Emmanuel, and the pupil of Saint Vincent, Jean François Paul de Gondi, so well known as Cardinal de Retz. Thus we see Saint Vincent's surroundings when he came in contact with Philippe-Emmanuel. The De Gondis occupied the See of Paris for one hundred and nine years, that is to say, from 1570 to 1679—in other words, during the seventeenth century. We can now understand why God took from the little village of Clichy and led into a wider sphere of influence the future founder of so many holy works.

Of these cardinals all, except Pierre de Gondi, who was too old and hardly known to our saint, were under his influence, and all manifested by their love for works of charity and their zeal for the religious establishments of the seventeenth century, a similar disposition, which they undoubtedly owed to him. The first of these, Henri de Gondi, brother of Philippe-Emmanuel, devoted his immense revenues to supporting the Carmelites, the Ursulines, the Dominicans, and Augustinians; the Hospital of Charity, the Capuchins, the Nuns of the Visitation, of Notre-Dame de la Merci, the Irish College, and especially the Oratory, mainly supported by himself and his aunt, the Marchioness of Meignelais. The second, François de Gondi, likewise a brother of Philippe-Emmanuel, coming a little later, when Saint Vincent was beginning his great works, fostered by every means in his power the foundation of the Congregation of the Mission, and

aided with his wealth and authority the erection of the seminaries of Saint-Nicolas du Chardonnet and Saint-Lazare. Finally, the third, Cardinal de Retz, the pupil of our saint, had at heart, amid all the dissipation and intrigues of his political life, the education and instruction of the clergy. "I endeavoured," he wrote in his *Memoirs*, "to examine the capacity of the priests of the diocese of Paris, and undoubtedly this was of the greatest advantage. For that end I established examining boards composed of canons, curés and religious." Those priests who were found qualified were allowed to exercise their functions, but the others were sent to houses where they received the requisite instruction. "You may well understand," he continues, "that these establishments should cost a good deal, but money came in from all sides."<sup>1</sup>

Let us now make the acquaintance of Philippe-Emmanuel de Gondi and his pious wife, Marguerite de Silly, with whom Saint Vincent was to spend twelve years. Philippe-Emmanuel, second son of Albert de Gondi, had succeeded his father at the age of seventeen, as Admiral of the Galleys and Lieutenant-General in command of the Levant. "He was," to quote the historians of the time, "the most renowned, the most successful and valiant man in the kingdom." Intimately connected with the Dukes of Guise and Chevreuse, with M.M. de Créqui and de Bassompierre, he spent his life amid the pleasures and dissipations of the Court, without, however, his uprightness and purity receiving the least stain. His piety suffered indeed, but only for a time, for later on it will be revived, and we shall see the Count still young, after the death of his wife, abandon all the pleasures and honours of this world, for an humble cell in the Oratory, under the direction of M. de Bérulle. Now, however, the world holds him captive. Like his mother, who was a Clermont, a woman of the highest character and passionately devoted to letters, knowing both Latin and Greek, the Count had inherited some of this literary taste. Historians even say "that he won as much glory by his pen as by his sword." A fine portrait of Philippe-Emmanuel by Corbinelli corresponds with these testimonies. "He had a noble head, and his finely carved features reflected the greatest sweetness; the eyes suggested meekness, the lips were slightly parted, and the nose was rather prominent. Yet there was nothing to remind one of his father, the intrepid Albert de Gondi, though we shall afterwards recognise his courage in his children."

<sup>1</sup> Chantelauze

About 1600, Philippe-Emmanuel, when hardly twenty, married François-Marguerite de Silly, a woman of exceptional virtue and sweetness, whose solid piety was at the same time scrupulous and exalted. According to a portrait by Duflos, "she had a Grecian profile of the greatest purity and delicacy, and her eyes, somewhat soft and listless, looked as if she were absorbed in heavenly contemplation. By the delicacy of the lines and expression of her countenance, she is a true Madonna of Pérugino's."<sup>1</sup> We must say it to the honour of Philippe-Emmanuel, that he prized the treasure which God had given him, showing her reverence as well as love, and when she died he could only solace his grief by entering religion.

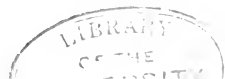
Three sons were born of this union, the three pupils of Saint Vincent.

The first, Pierre, born in Paris in 1602, and thus in his eleventh year when confided to Saint Vincent, was destined, like his ancestors, to fill an office in the State. Hardly twenty, he accompanied his father when the latter was for the first time bringing the galleys through the Straits of Gibraltar, to join the King's forces before La Rochelle. Fighting bravely in the island of Ré, he was wounded in the shoulder and had his horse shot under him. All during life he was more a man of action than of diplomacy, possessing exceptional courage and indomitable determination.

The second, Henri de Gondi, destined for the Church, as sweet-tempered and pious as his mother, was pale and blond, unlike his brothers, whose dark complexion recalled their Florentine extraction. Ambitious as all the De Gondis were, even in his youth he was heard to say, "I wish to be a cardinal, to surpass my brother." This he should have been had not death suddenly taken him away. He was killed in 1622 by a fall from his horse.

When Saint Vincent arrived at Montmirail, where the family were at the time, M. and Mme. de Gondi had only these two children, but a third was to be born, the future Cardinal de Retz. He came into the world on September 20, 1613, and received in baptism the name of François-Paul. Born during the Chapter-General of the Order of Malta, he was even in his cradle enrolled a chevalier. As a matter of fact, in the beginning his education was directed to this end; but when his brother destined for the Church was killed in the hunting-field, his parents suddenly changed their minds and wished François

<sup>1</sup> Chantelauze, p. 79.



Paul to take his place. "I do not believe," he wrote in his Memoirs, "there was a better-hearted man in the world than my father, who was truly virtuous. However, neither my duelling nor my frivolities was sufficient to deter him from sending me into the ecclesiastical state, though there was no one in, perhaps, the world less suited. His preference for my elder brother, and the prospect of the archbishopric which belonged to our house led him to this determination. He did not think so himself, and I would pledge my word that in his heart he was urged by no other motive than the fear he felt that any other profession would expose my soul to great danger." This is perfectly true, both on his father's side, and even still more on his mother's ; but such was the influence of the traditions at the time, that even the greatest souls could hardly escape,

Saint Vincent had a twofold office to fulfil with regard to the three children, namely, to teach them the fundamental principles of their religion, to know, love, and serve God, and at the same time to initiate them into Greek and Latin. Mme. de Gondi placed above everything else the first part of their education, and it was for this reason she said to M. de Bérulle, "I far prefer that my children should be great saints in heaven than great lords on earth."<sup>1</sup>

We might have had interesting details of the first lessons given by Saint Vincent, if the Memoirs of his third pupil, Cardinal de Retz, had been entirely preserved. Unfortunately the two hundred and fifty pages in which he relates his youth have been destroyed, though we know not by whom or for what object. It is indeed a heavy loss from a literary point of view, and absolutely irreparable from an historical.

If we may judge of the education of the two elder brothers by that of the younger, we can form some idea of the conduct of Saint Vincent de Paul. "Vincent de Paul," says an old historian, "instructed the future Cardinal de Retz in his studies, and he made wonderful progress. He learned as many as seven languages with great facility, Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Italian, Spanish, German, and French, which he spoke with the greatest facility. He gained, amid universal applause, his doctorate at the Sorbonne. In reading his Memoirs we must recognise the excellence of his French. His Italian was not much inferior, and there remain many letters written in Latin, worthy of Bembo and Sadolet. He knew Greek so well that, while attending the Congregation of the Index, he translated with

<sup>1</sup> Collet *Vie du Pere de Gondi*.



ease a book written in modern Greek. Finally, towards the end of his life, he read his breviary in Hebrew. Yet I do not speak here of that genius that sparkles in his *Memoirs*; of that vivid, familiar, yet dignified language, which shows the master-hand, in which are combined a Saint Simon and a Bossuet; for those are things not learned from any master, however eminent."

As to the moral and religious education Saint Vincent gave to his pupils, naturally so strong-willed, we can see that the eldest had not failed to profit by it. "Young as he was," says Corbignelli, "he had the mind, the courage, the piety, the prudence and maturity of a man." With regard to the second, killed while still young by a fall from his horse, who can tell the teaching with which the saint had instilled into this young soul, and what faith and love of God he manifested when dying? The third,<sup>1</sup> it is true, passed his life in storms and dissipation, which, however, manifested the greatness of his genius, though also the regrettable strength of his passions. But historians have not told how these dissipations were often abandoned for a retreat in Saint-Lazare, and that in the end of his days he clearly showed that disgust for earthly things which is known best by those who have lived to see their folly. He deserved the noble language which Bossuet applied to him. "That man so faithful to friends, so formidable to the State, of a character so great, that we cannot estimate it, fear it, love it, or hate it by halves—that mighty genius, which, by carrying all before it, won a position which in the end he wished to abandon as too dearly bought, and as incapable of satisfying his desires, for he saw his error and the emptiness of earthly grandeur. But while he was still seeking what one day he was to despise, he moved everything by secret and powerful springs, and after conquering all, he still seemed to stand alone, and still to menace the victorious favourite with his sad but fearless aspect."

It was, probably, in gratitude for all the services rendered to his children, and also in order the more to attach him to his house, that in 1615 M. de Gondi offered to Saint Vincent a canonry in the celebrated chapter of Éconis, in the diocese of Evreux. On the De Gondi estate there were many benefices which were in the power of the Count to confer, according to the custom of the time. He presented the first that became vacant

<sup>1</sup> Cardinal de Retz was only ten years old when Saint Vincent left the family of De Gondi.

to Saint Vincent. Not that he intended he should occupy it; for a substitute was arranged for, as the saint was to remain with the family. It was merely an honorary title which our saint could not decline. He took possession of it by proxy on May 27, 1615, and in person in the following September. We read in a registry of the old college chapel of Éconis, "that M. Vincent de Paul, priest, bachelor in theology, presented himself to take the oath of fidelity, and to give the kiss of peace, which were necessarily gone through, before a canon who had taken possession by proxy, could enter the choir in his vestments. Consequently M. Vincent de Paul took the oath, and promised to fulfil his duties; but being obliged to live in Paris, he asked and obtained a substitute. After this he received the kiss of peace, and invited the chapter to dinner the next day, the feast of the dedication of Éconis, *pro suo jucundo adventu*, according to the custom."<sup>1</sup> This is the only function that he fulfilled, for we never again hear of him in Econis.

While Saint Vincent was labouring patiently at the education of his pupils, he unconsciously exercised a profound influence on their parents. It must be acknowledged, too, that they had never seen his equal. This holy man had made for himself a Thebaid in the Count's magnificent palace, and from that he only emerged when duty towards the children or business with their parents demanded it. With what respect he treated them! Full of faith and accustomed to seek God in everything, he saw in M. de Gondi our Lord, and in Mme. de Gondi the Blessed Virgin. It is from himself we learn this. When one of his priests was about to spend some time with a great lord, he gave him some advice how to conduct himself worthily with regard to confession, communion, and holy mass said in presence of the lord. "There are," he said, "some ceremonies at the end of mass which we must observe before distinguished people. After removing the chasuble, a salute is made to them, as I have seen his lordship of Geneva make to the Admiral of the Galleys. You are far below that holy prelate. It seems, too, that the corporal is brought to them to be kissed, and holy water sprinkled after mass; I never did it, but you can find out for yourself. I made it a maxim to regard M. de Gondi in God, and God in him, and to obey him in this spirit. Likewise I looked upon Mme. de Gondi as the Blessed Virgin, and only came into their presence when summoned, or on urgent business. In the name of God, sir, do the same. As to the servants, honour them, and treat them

<sup>1</sup> Maynard, vol. i. p. 87.

kindly and with respect, sometimes speaking to them of God and holy things.<sup>1</sup>

The result of all this was a sweet, recollected, humble, self-sacrificing deportment, which gave to his words an extraordinary charm.

But the humility of our saint did not prevent him from being firm. Of this we have a remarkable example. Philippe-Emmanuel had been insulted at court, and, notwithstanding his piety, felt that it was only due to himself, his name and his family, to remove the stain with his opponent's blood. But before fighting the duel, by one of those inconsistencies which are not uncommon, he went to hear mass, and remained a long time in prayer, recommending to God the issue of the duel and the salvation of his soul. It was Saint Vincent who said mass. Knowing the Count's intention, perhaps having been told by the Countess, when mass was over and all had retired, the saint went and knelt beside him. "Permit me, my lord," said he to the Count, "to have a word with you. I understand you are about to fight a duel. I declare to you on the part of our Lord, whom you have been adoring, that if you do not abandon this wicked design, He will exercise His justice on you and your posterity."<sup>2</sup> Moved by these words, M. de Gondi promised before the altar, to leave it to God to avenge him.

We may well understand that Mme. de Gondi was by no means the last to feel the perfume of sanctity that radiated from Saint Vincent de Paul. Timorous almost to being scrupulous, she yearned to open her mind to him, but dared not. She then had recourse to M. de Bérulle, "praying him to compel this wise and virtuous priest to take care of her conscience, and to assist her with his advice. This the saint did in a spirit of obedience to him whom he regarded as the father of his soul, although in doing so his humility made him feel confused."<sup>3</sup> Under the guidance of her holy director, Mme. de Gondi made rapid progress. Too introspective and scrupulous, he drew her out of herself and applied her to works of charity. She visited the poor, comforted the sick, and went even to the most wretched hovels. Kind and gracious, she gave more by her very presence than by her purse, so that all the poor and dying were yearning to see her. She refused no one, till at last her strength gave way under such fatigue; and falling sick, she was at the point of death. It seems that Saint Vincent did not spare himself either, for his health was threatened; but he escaped, thanks to his robust constitution.

<sup>1</sup> "Letters."

<sup>2</sup> Abelly, vol. i. p. 30.

<sup>3</sup> Abelly, vol. i., p. 30.

How we should wish to have the details of these charitable efforts made with such fervour by Mme. de Gondi and her holy director ; but the humility of both was greater even than their charity. A single instance has escaped, which shows us the greatness of their charity, more solicitous for the soul than for the body. At this time the De Gondis were at their seat in Folleville, near Amiens. One evening Saint Vincent was asked to hear a dying peasant's confession. "Although this man," says Abelly, "had always lived like a Christian, the saint found his conscience loaded with mortal sins, which through shame he had always concealed. While Saint Vincent was on his way to the house, it occurred to him that it would be safer for the dying man to make a general confession. The result shows that this thought was from God ; for Mme. de Gondi arriving shortly afterwards, the dying man of his own free will acknowledged his having made sacrilegious confessions. The virtuous lady," continues Abelly, "was dumbfounded, and exclaimed to Saint Vincent, "Ah, sir, what is this ? Unquestionably it is the same way with other poor people. If this man, who was regarded as good, was in a state of damnation, what will it be with others who are looked upon as bad ? Ah, Mr. Vincent, how souls are lost ! What can we do to remedy matters ?'"

Mme. de Gondi begged our saint to preach the following Sunday on general confessions. "God," says Saint Vincent, "was so pleased with the faith and confidence of this lady (for the number and enormity of my sins would destroy the fruit of the discourse), that he poured down special blessings on it." He touched all their hearts so much, that all came to make general confessions. "We afterwards went to other villages belonging to the Countess," continues the saint, "and there too we had like success. Behold the first sermon of the mission, and the success which God bestowed upon it, on the feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul, January 25, 1617—a day not indeed without a special design of Providence."<sup>1</sup>

This event made a deep impression on Mme. de Gondi, who immediately placed in reserve a sum of 16,000 livres, to offer it to a Congregation that would agree to give missions every five years in the villages belonging to her. At first she applied it to the Jesuits and Oratorians but they refused. In the end, not knowing where to turn, she made a will by which she left the above sum to Saint Vincent, to found missions where and as

<sup>1</sup> Abelly, vol. i. pp. 33, 34.

he pleased. As for him, he ever affectionately remembered that day, and always celebrated its anniversary. He little thought, however, that that first mission was as it were the beginning of all the others, the seed of a Congregation destined to evangelise the poor country people, and for that reason called the Congregation of the Mission.

Was it this mission of Folleville that rekindled in the heart of Saint Vincent his passionate love of the poor? Or was it a desire for a more hidden life? However it was, a sudden and new change came about. Suddenly, Saint Vincent left Montmirail and the family of De Gondi, with the intention of not returning. He did not dare to say so, but made a short visit to Paris his pretext for leaving, and wrote from that city to M. de Gondi. When the letter reached the Count, our saint was far away in the heart of Bresse, in a small and poor village called Châtillon-les-Dombes.

When we seek a reason for this extraordinary act on the part of so prudent a man, we come in contact with a great saint's delicacy of soul. During the five years he had been with the family of De Gondi, Saint Vincent saw that a sort of veneration was growing up around him. They treated as a saint him who called himself a "wretch." He felt, therefore, that he should find some place where he was unknown, and could live in the greatest obscurity. Moreover, Mme. de Gondi was placed under his direction, and experienced under his guidance an inexpressible peace. Pious almost to scrupulosity, ever fearing to offend God, she felt that she could no longer do without her director. She wished to have him always near her. From time to time he compelled her to confess to another, and forced her to acknowledge that she had received consolation. She obeyed, and was thankful for the benefit to her soul, but returned with all the more eagerness to her holy director. Seeing this, Saint Vincent feared that he might be the unintentional cause of retarding her progress in perfection. After the example of our Lord, who said to his Apostles, "It is good for you that I go," and knowing that Mme. de Gondi was capable of the highest detachment, he resolved to leave her house.

It would seem that the question of the education of the children had weight with him also. They were growing up, the eldest was already fifteen, and our saint thought that a "poor scholar of the fourth form," as in his humility he called himself, was incapable of giving "to these three young noblemen" an education suitable to the exalted positions they were

afterwards to occupy. Moreover, these children were "veritable imps," as the Marchioness of Maignelais laughingly remarked.

They little resembled their father or mother. On the contrary, we recognise in them all the passion, the ambition and genius of their grandfather, Marshal de Retz, and of their grand-uncle, the first Cardinal de Gondi. Between their fathers and their children, Philippe-Emmanuel and his pious wife were as doves among vultures.

Let us add as an additional motive for the saint's departure, that the peace of the family was troubled by political events. Civil war was in the streets, and had penetrated into the very houses. Concini, so famous as Marshal d'Ancre, was killed when leaving the Louvre on April 24, 1617. His wife, after witnessing the noblest being murdered, was herself burned on July 8, in the Place de Grève.

Mary de Medicis was sent into exile. The house of De Gondi, of Florentine extraction, naturally became the centre of the most heated political passion. This was distasteful to Saint Vincent. He thirsted for peace, silence, humility, and forgetfulness of these agitations; for some quiet place where he should hear only of God and the poor. However, he did nothing without consulting M. de Bérulle, so, relating the motives we have been speaking of, he explained to him the requirements of his soul. M. de Bérulle, seeing himself in presence of a man who was guided by the highest motives of faith, and who, as he believed, was urged by a special providence of God, particularly in this matter of giving missions to the poor country-people, gave his consent for Vincent's departure. Thus Saint Vincent left the house of De Gondi, happy in forgetting that great world which was so agitated, and in finding himself once more in the midst of his dear poor. He arrived in Châtillon-les-Dombes early in 1617, and was installed as curé on August 1.

## CHAPTER V.

SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL CURÉ OF CHATILLON-LES-DOBES—  
HE BEGINS TO EMPLOY WOMEN, THEN MEN, IN THE  
SERVICE OF THE POOR—HE RETURNS TO THE FAMILY OF  
DE GONDI—DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHARITIES

1617-1621.

SAINT VINCENT had, so to speak, fled from the house of De Gondi. He set out, giving as a pretext for his journey business in Paris, but without telling anybody that he would not return. Hence, his first care as soon as he was installed in Châtillon was to write to M. de Gondi, who at the time was in command of the royal galleys off Provence. In explanation of his departure, he merely adduced his incapacity to give suitable education and instruction to his children. We may guess the astonishment and grief of M. de Gondi. Constantly away campaigning, and mixed up with all the political strife of the time, he felt at ease in knowing there was in his house a priest of such exalted virtue and solid judgment. But what greater astonishment and what keener grief was that of Mme. de Gondi! For herself, in the direction of her delicate conscience, for the education of her three children, and later on for her husband's conversion from wordliness, she had great need of Saint Vincent. He alone was capable of doing all this. Some fragments of letters which were exchanged at this time are preserved, and they are admirable. This is how M. de Gondi breaks the news to his pious wife: "I am in despair at a letter which M. Vincent has written to me, and which I am sending you to see if there is any way of avoiding the misfortune of losing him. I am extremely surprised that he had said nothing to you of his determination, and that you did not know of it. I beg of you to do everything that we may not lose him, for even if what he says of his incapacity were true, it would not prevail with me. Nothing is of such consequence as our own salvation and that of our children, towards which I feel certain he could one day powerfully aid, and also towards the resolutions I have often spoken to you about, and which I desire more than ever to be able to take. I have not yet answered his letter, and I shall wait till I hear from you. Do you think

the intervention of my sister Mme. Raguy, who is not far from him, would be of any advantage? I believe there will be nobody more influential than M. de Bérulle. Tell him, if even M. Vincent is not fitted to teach youth, he can have an assistant; but in any case I must have him back in my house, where he can live as he pleases, and I perhaps as I ought to live, if he is with me.

Mme. de Gondi received this letter on the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, September 14, 1617. She was quite overcome, continually crying and unable to eat or sleep.<sup>1</sup> "I should never have thought it," said she to one of her friends; "M. Vincent was so charitable to my soul that I could not think he would abandon me in this way. However, God be praised! I will not accuse him—far from it; I believe he does nothing but by the special providence of God, and urged by His holy love. But, in truth, his departure is very strange, and I confess I cannot understand it. He knows the need I have of his guidance, and the affairs I have to confer with him about, the pain of mind and body I suffer for want of assistance, the good I am anxious to do among my people, and which it is impossible to undertake without his advice. In a word, I feel my soul in a most pitiable state." And showing her husband's letter to her friend, she added: "You see with what regret the Admiral writes to me. I know my children will grow worse daily, and all the good he was accomplishing in the house, and to the seven or eight thousand on our estates is now at an end. What! Are not these souls as dearly bought with the precious blood of our Lord as those of Bresse? Are they not as dear to Him? Truly, I do not know how M. Vincent looks at it, but I feel certain that I ought to neglect no means of bringing him back. He only seeks the greater glory of God, and I wish for nothing against the Divine will. I beseech God with all my heart to restore him, and I pray the Blessed Virgin, and I would beg of her still more earnestly were it not that my own interests are bound up with those of my children, my family and subjects." Nothing is more beautiful than those letters. Mme. de Gondi went at once to M. de Bérulle to disclose her grief, her needs, and the delicate scruple she had of acting against the will of God in endeavouring to recall M. Vincent. M. de Bérulle reassured her, and admiring the sensitiveness of that Christian soul, urged her to write herself to the saint. Behold how she did

<sup>1</sup> Abelly, vol. i. p. 39.



so : " My anguish is insupportable without an extraordinary grace, which I do not merit. If it were only for a time, I should not have so much difficulty ; but when I think of all the occasions when I shall want assistance, direction and advice, in life and at death, my sorrows are renewed. Think you, can my mind and body endure these pains for any length of time ? I am not fit to seek or receive assistance elsewhere, for you know how I am situated. M. de Bérulle promised me to write to you, and I beseech God and the Blessed Virgin to send you back for the salvation of our family and of many others, towards whom you might exercise your charity. I implore you once more, practise this charity towards us for the love you bear our Lord, to whose will I submit now, notwithstanding the great fear I have of being unable to persevere. If after this you refuse me, I will accuse you before God of whatever evil happens to me, and of the omission of the good I shall be unable to do for want of assistance. You make me run the risk of often being deprived of the sacraments, and of being exposed to severe trials without any assistance. You see that the Admiral has the same desire as myself, which God alone in His mercy gives him. Do not turn away from the good you can do by assisting towards his salvation, since he may one day in his turn assist many others. I know that by my life I only offend God, but my soul requires assistance at the hour of death. Remember the distress you saw me in during my late illness in the village. I am in a worse state now, and the very fear of it frightens me so much, that I am afraid, without watchfulness, it may cause my death." <sup>1</sup>

Saint Vincent was deeply moved by this letter. He fell on his knees and implored God to make known His holy will. He visited the Blessed Sacrament, and many times offered the adorable sacrifice to obtain light ; but although his soul was most sensitive to the movements of grace, he felt no supernatural attraction to return. The work for which he had come to Châtillon was not yet accomplished.

After writing to Mme. de Gondi in order to console her, and to urge her to seek only the holy will of God, he set about the sanctification of his parish. If this was in a sad state, it was not for want of priests. There were six priests in this parish of two or three thousand souls, but they were far from being exemplary, seldom occupying themselves with their spiritual charge, but rather scandalising the town by

<sup>1</sup> Abelly, vol. i. p. 39.

their indolence. What was to be done to remove so much bad example? Saint Vincent sweetly insinuated himself into their confidence, and ended by inducing them "to band together in a kind of community, so as to give themselves the more perfectly to God and the Church. He persuaded them to do this, and they continued so for a long time afterwards, to the great edification of the whole parish."<sup>1</sup> At the same time he was devoting himself to catechising the children, the only means of radically reforming a parish; to teaching the ignorant, who abounded in consequence of the almost total absence of instruction; to converting heretics, whom the neighbourhood of Geneva had multiplied; and to withdrawing from their frivolous and dissipated life the gentry, who lived in the castles and surrounding towns. We shall see later on that the voice of Saint Vincent was one of the most eloquent of the seventeenth century. In the pulpit, in the confessional, by the sick-bed, everywhere he triumphed. Here he worked wonders. We may mention in particular Count Rougemont, a notorious duellist, and so skilled, that his victims were innumerable. Hearing of the saint, he came to the church at Châtillon to listen. His faith was awakened, and he fell at the knees of the holy priest, who henceforth had more to do in restraining his piety than in exciting it. He sold his Rougemont estate, and devoted the money to the foundation of monasteries and the relief of the poor. Saint Vincent had to prevent him from disposing of the remainder of his property; otherwise, said the saint, before a month the man would not possess an inch of land, like our Saviour, who had not a place to lay His head. "I am breaking, rending, and destroying everything," said he to Saint Vincent, "and will go to heaven stript of all things." However, his sword, the last, the dearest of his human attachments still remained; for he could not bring himself to cast it away. One day, while riding, shame at such cowardice seized him. He stopped his horse, dismounted, drew his sword, and broke it in a thousand pieces on a stone; then remounting, he exclaimed "Now I am free."

Another conversion created no less astonishment. Two young ladies, Mme. de Chassigne and Mme. de Brie, gifted with beauty and fortune, were living a life of pleasure, gaiety and general dissipation. It happened that they entered the church while Saint Vincent was preaching. Both were moved by his words, and on exchanging their sentiments, determined to go together to the holy priest. In a few words the saint

<sup>1</sup> Abelly, vol. i. p. 38.

perfected his work, and they left him, resolved to renounce the vanities of their wordly life and to devote themselves to the service of the poor. This pledge they fulfilled in an heroic degree during the terrible epidemic that decimated Châtillon a short time afterwards.

We might dwell on other conversions ; that of a young and rich Protestant, M. Bergnier, with whom, for the want of a presbytery, Saint Vincent was staying, and whose hospitality he repaid with the gift of faith ; that of his brother-in-law, an old soldier of the Duke of Montpensier, and others. But we must hasten on to the great event which, in the order of Divine Providence, was the only reason perhaps for Saint Vincent's coming to Châtillon.

One day as the saint was vested, about to say mass, Mme. de Chassigne asked him to recommend to the charity of the parishioners a poor family, all the members of which were ill in a house half a league from Châtillon. He spoke on their behalf with his usual earnestness and sympathy, and in the afternoon he set out, accompanied by one of his parishioners, to visit the afflicted people. As they went along he was agreeably surprised to meet a number of persons who had been moved by his words, returning from the house, whither they had brought assistance. "Behold," said he, "noble but ill-regulated charity. These poor people, provided with too much now, must allow some to perish, and then they shall be in want just as before."

He brought Mme. de Chassigne and Mme. de Brie, pointed out the inconvenience of charity so ill-regulated, and asked them to assist him in bringing together some piously inclined ladies. "I suggested to them," says the saint, "to club together to do the needful every day, not only for this poor family, but for others that might turn up in future. Behold," he adds "the beginning of the Association of Charity."<sup>1</sup>

With that sound sense and spirit of organisation which characterised him, he employed the ladies of the parish in this work for three months without written rules, and it was only after seeing how they worked that he drew up the rules. A happy accident brought to light only a few years ago, February, 20, 1839, in the archives of Châtillon, the autograph book of rules, the first which the saint had written, and which was stamped with the seal of that consummate prudence which he always manifested.

<sup>1</sup> *Conferences aux Filles de la Charité*

He began by pointing out the end of this institution, and we must at once remark his deep humility in attributing to others all the honour of its initiation. "Charity towards the neighbour being one of the infallible marks of the true children of God, and one of its principal exercises being to visit and comfort the sick poor, some pious young ladies and good people of Châtillon-les-Dombes, in the diocese of Lyons, desirous of being true children of God, have come together in order to assist spiritually and temporally their fellow townspeople, who sometimes suffer more for want of order than from want of charitable persons. But since there is danger that after beginning this good work, it should perish in a short time, if the members have not some union and spiritual bond between them, they are anxious to join in a body that can be formed into an association with the following rules. Everything, however, must be done with the consent of their worthy prelate the Archbishop, to whom the entire work is subject." When the work was established he named it. "The said association shall style itself the 'Association of Charity,' and its members the 'Servants of the Poor' or 'Ladies of Charity.' Their patron shall be our Lord, who loved the poor so much. Every Christian woman, widows as well as the married and single, who are pious and virtuous, can become members, provided, however, that wives and daughters have the consent of their husbands or parents, and not otherwise." Thus there is nothing secret or hidden, everything is open to broad daylight.

The work once begun, he established a form of government. In the first place there was to be a president, elected by the members, "whom they should love and respect as a mother, obeying her in everything that regarded the welfare and service of the poor, and all for the love of our Lord, who became obedient unto death, and that the death of the Cross." To assist the president, two of the most prudent and humble of the association were to act as assistant and treasurer. And as it was not becoming that women alone should have charge of the funds of the association, they should elect as bursar some ecclesiastic or pious layman of the town, devoted to the welfare of the poor, and not embarrassed with business. This person should be regarded as a member of the association, participate in the indulgences that would be granted to it, assist at its meetings, and have a vote like the others while bursar, but no longer. All, however, president, treasurer, assistant, and bursar, were to be subject to the curé or his vicar, so that

everything would be carried on for the benefit of the parish and not wasted.

A wholesome advice is addressed to the treasurer. "The treasurer shall keep the money, papers and goods, and render her account on Pentecost Monday of each year, in presence of the curé, president, bursar, and assistant ; and this report shall be accepted without investigation, such being the integrity of the treasurer and the confidence placed in her, that no one would attempt to cross-examine it even if afforded an opportunity."

But where the saint excels is in his directions how to treat the poor. The Ladies of Charity shall visit only those whose case has been examined and passed by the president, assistant, and treasurer ; and then this is how they are to act. "The lady who visits shall get the nourishment from the treasurer, cook it, and bringing it to the invalids, cheerfully and kindly salute them on entering their apartment. She shall arrange the tray on the bed, spreading a napkin over it, and placing on it a glass, spoon, and bread-roll. Next she shall wash the sick person's hands, say Grace, and then having poured out the soup and put the meat on a plate, she shall arrange all on the tray. She shall kindly invite the sick person to eat, for the love of Jesus Christ and His Blessed Mother, doing all in a spirit of love, as if dealing with her own child, or rather with God Himself, who regards as done to Himself what is done to the poor. While conversing in this spirit about our Lord, she shall try to cheer the invalid if downcast, cutting his food and pouring out the drink. Thus having set things going, if there is any one at hand she shall leave the rest to him, and go on to the next sick person, whom she shall treat in the same way. She shall remember always to begin with those who have somebody to help them, and to finish with those who have nobody, so as to be able to remain a longer time with them. In the evening she shall return with the supper, and go through the same arrangements as before.

"Each invalid shall receive as much bread as is necessary, with a quarter of a pound of mutton or boiled veal for dinner, and as much roast for supper, except on Sundays and feasts, when boiled chicken shall be given, and two or three times a week minced pie. Those who have no fever may get a pint of wine every day, half in the morning and half in the evening.

"And since the object of this institution is not only to assist the poor corporally, but also spiritually, the members shall endeavour and make it their aim to dispose those whom they

succour to lead better lives, and prepare for death those who are dying, directing their visits to this end, and frequently asking God in prayer for the same object. The dead shall be buried at the expense of the association, the ladies obtaining a shroud and purchasing a grave, if the deceased had no means. They shall assist at the funerals if convenient, acting as mothers who follow their children to the grave."

What thoughtfulness ! The members were to serve the invalid with love, as if their own child ; always to begin with those who had some one to help them, so as to remain the longer with those who had none ; and to assist at the funerals, like a mother at the grave of her child. What delicacy of feeling was this !

Saint Vincent then lays down that the meetings shall be held every month, when the curé shall briefly give an exhortation for the spiritual advancement of the members. Next he points out the spiritual exercises for each ; among others, "those who can, shall read every day, slowly and attentively, a chapter from the *Introduction to a Devout Life*, raising their hearts to God before beginning, in order to implore His grace to derive profit from this holy exercise."

He had these rules approved by the Archbishop of Lyons, and then solemnly gave them in this form on Dec. 8, 1617, the feast of the Immaculate Conception : "In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, feast of the Immaculate Conception, I, Vincent de Paul, priest and unworthy curé of Châtillon-les-Dombes, having shown the Rules to M. Faye, the Vicar-General of the diocese, the Archbishop has approved of them. By virtue of this approbation we have to-day erected the association, having previously made known its nature and its end, namely, to assist the sick poor of the town, both spiritually and corporally." Then appealing to those present who were anxious to join, the following presented themselves : F. Baschet, Charlotte Brie, G. Puget, F. Gomard, Denise Penier, P. Mulger, Catherine Patissier, J. Perra, Florence Gomard (daughter of Denis Gomard), B. Prost, and T. Guyac.

"Next proceeding to the election of officers, the following were chosen :—president, Mdle. Baschet ; treasurer, Mdle. Charlotte Brie ; assistant, Mme. Puget ; and honourable bursar, Jean Benier. The election took place on Dec. 12, 1617, in the hospital chapel, and the votes are recorded below. Signed, Vincent de Paul."

Thus was formally constituted the first association of charity founded by Saint Vincent de Paul. For the first time was

organised the visitation of the poor and sick by ladies of the world, free from every bond and vow, still living in their homes, and only visiting the poor with the consent of their husbands, fathers, or mothers. Thus was united domestic duty with external charity.

With the first stroke Saint Vincent had accomplished a masterpiece. He did not disregard the venerable Hôtel-Dieu, carried on by enclosed religious, so necessary for the destitute and sick, and a work in which he himself co-operated afterwards. But side by side and in conjunction with it, he had the visitation of the poor by ladies of the world. God blessed this pious undertaking, and at present it is spread all over the world.

Meanwhile, Mme. de Gondi was not resigned to the absence of her holy director, and increased her endeavours to get him back. She requested and obtained her most pressing letters from her husband for this end, from her brother-in-law Henri de Gondi, Archbishop of Paris, and from Père de Bérulle. To deliver these letters she deputed one of the most intimate friends, M. du Fresne, who had introduced Saint Vincent to Queen Margaret, and who himself was brought by the saint as secretary to the De Gondis. This kind and good man fulfilled his mission with such delicacy, prudence, and persuasiveness, that it ended in Saint Vincent yielding. The argument which seemed to weigh most with him was, that the good he was doing at Châtillon was necessarily limited, and that after having founded the association of charity, nothing more was wanting. On the other hand, if he returned to the De Gondi family, he might, aided by their patronage and wealth, extend and multiply the charitable works which he contemplated, not only among the seven or eight thousand on their estate, but also in Paris and elsewhere. This was clear. Saint Vincent attracted by the prospect of the hidden life, prayed fervently, went to consult Father Bence of the Oratory at Lyons, and ended by entrusting to M. du Fresne two letters, one for the Admiral and the other for his wife, in which he announced his approaching visit to Paris, and his intention of leaving everything in the hands of M. de Bérulle.

We shall say nothing of the deep affliction of the people of Châtillon on hearing that they were about to lose their curé. The scenes at Clichy were renewed. At the first mention from the pulpit of his departure, sobs were heard.

The same evening he distributed among his dear poor, whom he was especially sorry to leave, his clothes and whatever else he possessed. They valued the slightest souvenir, and one of them, Julien Caron, was quite besieged while guarding an old hat.

The day he left, the whole parish turned out. When he appeared all fell on their knees and cried out, "Your blessing," which the saint gave with tears in his eyes. Almost fifty years afterwards, witnesses of the scene, or their children and grandchildren, declared on oath, with a view to his canonisation, that it would be impossible to relate all Saint Vincent did in so short a time (five months), and they would hardly believe it, had they not seen and heard it. Such was their esteem for him that they spoke of him only as a saint. They were convinced that what he had accomplished at Châtillon was sufficient for his canonisation, which they had no doubt should one day take place.

Saint Vincent arrived in Paris, December 23, 1617. In the evening he visited M. de Bérulle, and on Christmas Day, 1617, returned to the family of De Gondi, only to leave it eight years afterwards, at the age of fifty, ready, after so long a preparation, to accomplish his greatest works.

The first act of Mme. de Gondi in her joy, was to make Saint Vincent promise that he would leave no more, as if she had a presentiment of her approaching end, so that he might assist her on her deathbed. Some historians are of opinion that from his return he was no longer charged with the education of the children. But this assertion is not supported by any kind of proof; on the contrary, M. de Gondi insisted on the saint's return for the sake of his influence over himself and his children. However, it is possible that some ecclesiastic or pious laic assisted him, so that while retaining the supervision of their education, he could freely devote himself to works of charity, towards which he felt more and more attracted.

The second sojourn of Saint Vincent among the poor terminated by their winning his heart and revealing his special vocation. Châtillon was a revelation to him, and he received there a light which he had not at Clichy. What had been done in the little town of Bresse, why was it not done everywhere? Why not at least try in the thirty or forty villages on the De Gondi property? Missions to instruct the poor and associations of charity to soothe their pains—that is what he meditated, and to that he resolved to consecrate whatever time and strength



God should give him. Mme. de Gondi listened with astonishment. She was delighted at the return of her director ; but how much more so when she saw him holier than ever, filled with love for these poor country people, whom she herself loved so much. She offered to assist him, by her influence, wealth, and very person, in establishing these charities. Thus supported, Saint Vincent set to work, and in two or three years established the association in thirty or forty villages on the De Gondi estate, after the missions which he usually gave himself. Mme. de Gondi used to be the first to give in her name, and thus drew everybody by her example. She was not satisfied with heading the list of the association, but would establish it in the villages before the missionaries came, visiting the poor and sick, and urging the people to make good use of the mission. It was worthy of tears to see this noble lady, so young, so delicate, so wealthy, sister-in-law or niece of several cardinals, showing such an heroic example of piety and charity.

She did not, however, remain alone, for terrible misfortunes caused to be associated with her in the service of the poor and sick, her husband's sister, Margaret de Gondi, Marchioness of Meignelais. She was the widow, in her twentieth year, of the heroic Marquis of Meignelais, whom she passionately loved, and whom the Duke of Mayenne had stabbed, because he suspected him to be an adherent of Henry IV. Shortly afterwards losing her only son, she entirely gave herself up to God and works of charity. "This young and beautiful woman, intelligent and fascinating, exchanged her costly silk and satin for coarse grey wool. Her head was closely veiled, her mantle the simplest, and for her diamonds she wore the cross of St. Francis." She excluded all luxury, delicacy, and superfluity from her house, and dispensed with all that ceremony which belongs to ladies of her rank, consisting of numerous attendants and costly equipage. She retained only a single carriage, which she had lined with coarse wool, and would have dispensed with it too, only it was shown to be necessary to enable her to visit the prisons and Hôtel-Dieu. "She sold her plate, her jewelry, her very rings and all the most precious things she had, not even keeping a mirror.<sup>1</sup> The most abandoned poor were to her the dearest, especially prisoners. She kissed their chains, and assisted those condemned to death with incomparable tenderness."

Her piety, together with her sorrow, would have led her very

<sup>1</sup> Chantelauze, p. 151.

far, and she would have hid herself under the veil of a daughter of Saint Francis, had not her uncle, Cardinal de Gondi, her confessor, M. de Bérulle, and even Paul V., decided that a person who expended all her rent-roll, 350,000 livres, an enormous sum at that time, in works of charity, would do more good in the world than in the cloister. Hence the Pope forbade her ever to think of entering religion. She submitted, but to compensate for it she gave herself might and main to works of charity. Worthy sister-in-law of Mme. de Gondi, and both noble helpmates of Saint Vincent de Paul!

We have no details concerning the thirty associations of charity founded in this first fervour. It is even with difficulty four or five are brought to light. The first was founded at Villepreux, in a village belonging to the De Gondis. It was approved in 1618 by the first Cardinal de Retz, uncle of Mme. de Gondi, and probably received the same rules as the foundation at Châtillon. The association of Joigny was established the same year, but with greater solemnity. Joigny was the principal seat of the De Gondi family. From it they took their title, and there they had a magnificent house, where they spent the autumn. Saint Vincent used this sojourn in giving a most successful mission to the little town, and at its close founded the association of charity. Mme. de Gondi wrote herself to the Archbishop of Sens for the necessary authorisation, and on September 6, 1618, in the chapel of Saint Antoine, she, accompanied by some of the most distinguished ladies, in presence of the mayor, sheriffs, and others, presented the Archbishop's letter, and was the first to inscribe her name on the list of members, and by her example attracted all the others. Saint Vincent said a few words and gave the rules, which were a résumé of those of Châtillon and Villepreux.

Two months afterwards, while M. and Mme. de Gondi were stopping at their seat at Montmirail, Saint Vincent took the opportunity, November, 1618, of founding the third association of charity. Here again it was Mme. de Gondi who applied to the Bishop of Soissons, praying him "to establish the association at Montmirail, in the vicinity, and all through his diocese, and to place the aforesaid establishment under M. Vincent, priest, bachelor of theology and her chaplain." This permission was granted, but the rules given by our saint have never been discovered.

In the following year, while the De Gondis were at Folleville, in the diocese of Amiens, the association was at once

established with the approbation of the Bishop. As usual, Mme. de Gondi's name was at the head of the list of the servants of the poor.

It was here, at this period of the foundations, that a courageous and happy enterprise was undertaken. Hitherto the saint had only employed women in the service of the poor, and it was at Folleville that the idea struck him—we do not know on what occasion—of also employing men. The undertaking was risky, particularly in a small village ; but the Admiral, who was also lord of the place, being the first to give his name, drew all by his example. We possess the rules of this first association of men, and they are the original of many others discovered since. The general plan is somewhat the same as the ladies' association, and the members bore the same name—servants of the poor. Their patron was the same—our Lord, who loved the poor so much ; and their object was the same—to fulfil the great wish of His heart, namely, that we should “love one another as He has loved us.” The men were to have charge of the healthy poor, the children, the young people and the old, leaving the care of the sick to the women, who are more suited to them.

To this association of men, with the same patron, object and spiritual functions, he gave an almost similar form of government. The members were to elect three from among themselves every two years. The first was to be the president ; the second the treasurer, who would keep the funds of the association in a safe, having two keys, one for the president, and the other for himself, and to be opened only in presence of the curé. The third was called the visitor, whose duty it was to go through the parish finding out the deserving poor, the widows, orphans and prisoners, and afterwards to report them to the association, in order that they might be visited and assisted.

Saint Vincent was so successful in this innovation that he hastened to establish it at Joigny, where already there was the ladies' association. It was the Count who took the initiative and obtained the necessary authorisation. The Archbishop granted full power to “M. Vincent, priest, bachelor of theology, and the Count's chaplain.” M. de Gondi, on the day of the foundation, May 30, 1621, was the first to inscribe his name, and after his example, his officers, the aldermen, lawyers, and the principal townspeople did the same. Saint Vincent wrote a few words at the bottom of the list, which is preserved as a precious autograph.

Although employing men in the service of the poor was a

successful and courageous undertaking, yet so far it had nothing very original, its rules being those of the ladies' association adapted to men. But beginning in this way, Saint Vincent had taken a step forward. In employing ladies he only required them to comfort the sick and to lighten their burden, but from the men he hoped for greater things. To assist the poor was good, but could not mendicity be put down? Poverty arising from youth that could not yet work, or from age that could no longer work; from sickness that took away strength, or from accidents that paralysed the limbs—undoubtedly we could never take sufficient care of such as those. But were there not poor who could work and would not, idlers who preferred to beg, sluggards who were a disgrace and a menace to society? Why support such? To give to them, was it not to encourage vice and rob the real poor? In well-organised society there would always be poor, but never beggars. The poor would always be succoured, the beggars would never be tolerated.

This is what the wisdom of Saint Vincent de Paul foresaw two centuries before our modern philosophers, and what he treated with the greatest statesmanship. He divided the poor into three classes: 1. Those who could not gain their livelihood, such as children, the aged, cripples, the sick, and to those the association was to give everything that was necessary. 2. There were those who could only earn half their support, and they were to receive the other half. 3. To those who could only earn a quarter, the association was to give the other three-quarters. Outside of those three classes there remained only the strong and healthy, who could work, and who, if they did not, should be discountenanced and refused all assistance. For this end the good priest did not hesitate to appeal to the mayors and corporations.

Let us hear him: "The association is instituted for the spiritual and corporal assistance of the poor of the towns and surrounding villages—spiritually, by teaching Christian doctrine and piety; and corporally, by procuring employment for those who could work, and assisting those who could not. In this way they fulfilled the command of God, in the fifteenth chapter of Deuteronomy, enjoining us so to act that '*there shall be no poor nor beggar among you.*' The number of the poor having been ascertained, and each having received aid proportionate to his want, 'they were prohibited from begging, under penalty of having the aid withdrawn, and the public were forbidden to give alms.'"

As to tramps, he established for them what are now known as night refuges. Here these poor people were received, given a supper and lodging, and the next morning they were sent away with two sous each.

To undertake this great work of aiding the poor according to their necessity, and of putting down begging in the streets, resources were necessary. Saint Vincent little felt this want when founding the ladies' association, for they easily gathered the money. It was not so with the men; and moreover, their association was a bigger work. Witness and admire his plans. When the association was established in a country town or village made up of labourers, he wished it to possess sheep and cattle, which should get free grazing. Each member was to take in one or two head of cattle, rear them out of charity, and the proceeds were to go to the poor. "The association shall have sheep," says one of the rules, "which shall be distributed among the members, who shall rear them through charity for the association, some more and some less, according to each one's means, and the lambs shall be sold every year by the visitor, about the feast of Saint John. The money shall be handed over to the treasurer, in presence of the president and the curé; and they shall mark the sheep with the seal of the association when renewing them every five years." In all this we can recognise the one time shepherd-boy of Dax.

When the association passed from the country to the town this scheme was impracticable; but the saint immediately devised another. This was work-shops, humble trades, so well organised that all, even the children, the convalescent, and the young men, could gain a livelihood. Let us listen to his sound common-sense, joined to such tender charity: "The poor are either little children from four to eight, or boys from eight to fifteen or twenty; or they are grown up, but helpless or old, who can earn only a part of their livelihood; or finally, they are the decrepit, who can do nothing. The association shall give every week, to the children, the feeble and decrepit, whatever is necessary for them, To those who can earn a part of their livelihood, it shall give the other part. The young boys shall be put at humble trades, such as weaving, which only costs three or four crowns for an apprentice; or better still, they shall erect a manufactory for some light work, as woollen socks. They shall gather the young fellows into a suitable hired house, where they shall reside and be trained under a master-worker according to the present arrangement."

"Under the supreme control of the association, two persons shall be appointed over the manufactory, one an ecclesiastic, the other the master-worker. It shall be the office of the ecclesiastic to teach Christian doctrine and piety to the apprentices and the poor, on feast days after vespers in the church, and on Tuesdays and Fridays at home, about ten o'clock, for an hour at least. He shall conduct the apprentices in order, two by two, to mass and vespers on Sundays and holidays, and on Saturdays and the vigils of great feasts to vespers, bringing them back in the same order. He shall see that the apprentices, as well as those who receive relief, go to confession and communion on the first Sunday of every month and on great feasts. He shall assist at the meals, and shall not absent himself nor receive an apprentice without the consent of the officers of the association of charity.

"The duty of the master-worker shall be to teach his trade to the apprentices whom the association sends, and he shall not, for any reason whatever, either take in or send away an apprentice without the permission of the association, which has full control."

Everything was to be done gratuitously. The only recompense which Saint Vincent required, further exemplifies his charity. The apprentices, with their parents' consent, shall pledge themselves to teach their trade gratis to the poor children of the town, whom the association will send to them, but the association shall continue to support these children.

The saint next makes out the order of the day for the manufactory, where the children were to be brought up temperately and strong, and not degraded and materialised as in modern institutions :—

4	A. M., Rising.	12	Dinner.
4.30	„ Morning Prayer.	3.30	P. M., <i>Gouté</i> .
5	„ Work.	7	„ Supper, Recreation.
6.30	„ Mass.	7.45	„ Night Prayer.
8	„ Dejeuner.	8	„ Retire to Rest.

Let us take notice of the main points of these regulations : to rise at four and retire at eight, with four repasts between ; prayer was joined with work. "By this means," said Saint Vincent, "the poor are brought up in the fear of God, taught to earn their living, assisted in their necessities, and the cities are delivered of the most dangerous sluggards."

It was not always possible to possess resources to meet such wants, but the saint used a thousand means : here, by permanent subscriptions from the Bishop, canons, or curés, lords

and rich people ; there, by collections at the church and from house to house ; again, by poor-boxes in the hotels ; sometimes, by penalties imposed by the judges, and by being relieved from payment of certain taxes. Many of these customs still exist, but whoever thinks that they owe their origin to Saint Vincent de Paul ?

The report of these new institutions reached Burgundy, where, after the religious strife, the people were vainly struggling in the midst of increasing pauperism. The cities were overrun. No remedy was found for such an evil, except shelters, where the poor were unwilling to enter, and where a too feeble police force was unable to retain them. They broke away shouting, and often sword in hand went about terrifying the inhabitants. In the midst of these difficulties it was rumoured that a priest, the Count de Joigny's chaplain, had formed a new institution, already established in many towns, and which met all difficulties. Whether Saint Vincent was specially invited, or whether in going from Paris to Marseilles he stopped of his own accord in one of these towns is not known ; the fact is, however, that in 1623 he went and made a somewhat lengthened stay in Burgundy. With this journey is connected the establishment of the association at Bourg, Trévoux, Mâcon, Châlons, and the neighbouring towns. A dark cloud enveloped these foundations, till in 1846 was discovered, in the archives of Mâcon, an extract from the secretary's book for the year 1623, containing the report of an assembly held in that town, on the occasion of a passing visit of Saint Vincent de Paul. This document is too interesting to omit reproducing it here :—

“All classes were represented at this assembly—the lieutenant-general, crown-prosecutor, the aldermen, the judges, curés, deans, and many of the distinguished gentry and merchants. The mayor spoke first. He explained that the object of their meeting was, in obedience to the divine precept, to provide for the poor. This charitable work was to be on new lines, and should do away with beggars at the church doors and houses, where they got assistance too freely, which made even those that were able, unwilling to work. For some time past it was thought to meet this difficulty by a hospital, but the poor disliked going there. Now, there was among them a holy man, the Count de Joigny's chaplain, who, filled with zeal and piety, had struck on a new plan, by which comfort and nourishment had been given to the poor of Trévoux and other places. He thought, therefore, that this opportunity ought to be utilised in the interests of the community.

"The Lieutenant-General followed, and said that this proposal ought to be received as a pious and praiseworthy scheme, and that if they could establish this association, which seemed easily done, they should avoid the importunities of beggars. If each one contributed something, it would be less burdensome than to give alms at the church or at their houses. The poor ought to be instructed, made to have a loving fear, catechised and brought to the sacraments. To accomplish this it was not necessary to have a separate building, where, moreover, they would not remain; but merely to select a few capable persons who would collect the contributions and distribute them according to what would be thought best.

"The Dean of Saint Vincent's then rose and said, that considering how much the poor are recommended in the Gospel, it gave him extreme pleasure to see realised what the piety of the late Bishop of Mâcon, Mgr. Goshard Dinet, had desired so much. However difficult it seemed, they ought to believe that God would make all things easy, since it concerned not only the corporal but also the spiritual welfare of the poor, towards which scheme they would willingly contribute, even out of the church revenue.

"M. Chandon, formerly crown-prosecutor, added, there was no one that did not accept and welcome the proposal, and as it was a work of charity and for the service of God, nothing would be impossible.

"The Crown Solicitor said, for his part, the matter was so good and praiseworthy, that there would not be one who would not be ready and willing to contribute something, seeing the instruction the poor should receive, as well in the service of God as in some trade.

"All spoke in their turn to the same effect, after which, as a beginning of so laudable a charity, it was unanimously resolved that each branch of the society should name delegates, and thus form a commission to institute ways and means of putting into practice what they had resolved upon. This was done the next day."<sup>1</sup>

Behold ancient France in her unity and grandeur! the lieutenant-general, crown-prosecutor, curés and deans, aldermen, presidents of the tribunals, king's councillors, the gentry and the bourgeois, all co-operating to advance not only the temporal but the spiritual interests of the poor, and justly deeming that in proportion as the poor become more moral and Christian, society becomes more secure and tranquil.

<sup>1</sup> This precious document was only recently discovered, and published for the first time by M. Henri Batault, in his *Histoire de l'association des dames de la Miséricorde de Châlon-sur-Saône*.



Saint Vincent does not seem to have been present at this assembly, though it was he who inspired and urged it on. In each speech we may recognise the doctrine he everywhere preached, and now that he was armed with full authority he immediately set to work.

As usual, to establish some order among this confused mass of true and false poverty, the first class really in want of charity, the second only abusing it, he began : (1) by separating the sick from the healthy ; (2) he confided the sick to some pious ladies who would visit and comfort them ; (3) he gave work to the healthy ; (4) he procured trades for the young ; (5) he distributed alms to those unable to work. These were assembled every Sunday at Saint-Nizier, to hear mass and a sermon, after which bread and money were distributed according to each one's necessity and the number of children. Begging was forbidden under penalty of having the aid withdrawn, while at the same time the faithful were earnestly recommended not to give money in the streets, and thus charity was made to suppress mendicity. As to tramps, they were to receive a night's lodging, and to be sent away the next morning with a little alms. Every precaution was taken to prevent idleness among the healthy poor. They were always made to earn their livelihood, and it was only after a severe examination of their work, that they received the additional amount which they could not earn. A supernatural wisdom, which we have already experienced, and of which we have here a new illustration, governed all these regulations.

For the resources and their administration Saint Vincent formed two associations of charity, one of men, the other of women. The bishop, the dean of the chapter, the curé of Saint-Pierre, and the lieutenant-general thought it an honour to join the first, while all the most distinguished ladies joined the second. In less than three weeks the association had worked wonders, and more than three hundred poor, had been lodged, fed, and clothed. The funds of the association consisted of a yearly tax on the clergy and rich people, whether in the form of money or goods ; of certain fines that were allocated to that object ; of certain tolls ; and of a collection made every Sunday by the young ladies of Mâcon. Saint Vincent had arranged that all aid was to be sent to the common fund, in order better to maintain discipline and improve the poor. The moment these arrangements were completed, the saint disappeared. He escaped incognito. This was the best course, for otherwise he could not have avoided a public ovation. He

says this himself in a letter to Mdle. de Gras : "Each one was bathed in tears, and the aldermen paid me so much honour, that not wishing to have it, I was compelled to leave in secret."

Thus after seventeen years of groping, our saint had found his true vocation. He discovered it himself, and began with two innovations, so original, so full of wisdom and moderation, and at the same time so courageous, that we may judge from these two master-strokes what the great organiser should accomplish when he attempted greater things, and how he should utilise greater resources.

And yet this magnificent work, hardly begun, was on the point of being stopped and nipped in the bud by the jealous susceptibilities of authority. In some legal documents of Beauvais is found a petition against Vincent de Paul, to prevent him continuing his good works. It is so interesting that we must beg leave to insert it fully here.

Draft of the Lieutenant of Beauvais' Appeal, found in the Judicial Registry, protesting against the establishment in that town of an Association of Charity, contemplated by Vincent de Paul.

"Though it has been shown by the Attorney-General, how strictly it is forbidden by royal ordinance and law, for any one to suggest or establish any society or confraternity within the kingdom, without his Majesty's letters-patent, nevertheless, it has happened during the last fifteen days that a certain priest named Vincent has, despite the royal authority, and without communicating with the royal officials or the municipal body, caused to be assembled a large number of women, whom he persuaded to join an association, to which he gave the name of Association of Charity. The said association is intended to aid and furnish a livelihood for the poor of this town, and to collect money each week for their benefit. This is to be carried out by the aforesaid association, which about three hundred women have joined, and they meet often to perform their duties, which ought not to be tolerated. Having regard to the legal prohibition, it is now requested that we be fully informed on the matter, in order to lay it before the King's Attorney-General."<sup>1</sup>

The title of this document, "Draft of Appeal," seems to show that it was never presented. The De Gondis, so powerful in Church and State, probably shielded the humble priest, and had the appeal set aside.

<sup>1</sup> Feillet, *Distress at the Time of the Fronde*, p. 212.

## CHAPTER VI.

COMMENCEMENT OF THE WORKS AMONG THE GALLEYS—SAINT VINCENT IN THE CHAINS OF A GALLEY-SLAVE—HE VISITS HIS HOME

1622-1623.

WHEN not at Montmirail, Joigny, Folleville, or Villepreux Saint Vincent lived in Paris. The De Gondis usually spent the winter there, in their beautiful house in the Rue Pavée near the parish of Saint-Saveur. It was during one of these sojourns in Paris that he came in contact with a more deplorable misery than he had hitherto experienced, of which he had no idea, and which deeply touched his heart, evoking even some of his highest acts of charity.

We have seen that M. de Gondi was Admiral of the Galleys, or, as we say now-a-days, in command of the Mediterranean squadron, for the galleys never left the Mediterranean, which was their station. A galley was known in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as a long low vessel, not very high out of the water, carrying about four hundred men, with five large and a dozen small guns. It was propelled by three hundred rowers, and carried about one hundred and twenty soldiers. These rowers were criminals sentenced to this wretched work, hence the name galley-slave or outcast. They were attached to the seat by chains, and bound in couples. Their shoulders were bare, and a cap covered their head. The chief officer stood at the stern, near the captain, to receive orders ; while the second and third were respectively in the middle and at the prow, all three brandishing lashes over the bare shoulders of the galley-slaves. When the captain gave the order to start, the chief officer signalled with his whistle, and the second and third began with their whips to strike the bare shoulders of the rowers, just as in our day the driver of a coach urges forward his team. If a rower flagged the captain shouted—"Double the lashes." Should he fall fainting on his oar (which often happened), then he was lashed till he came to, or till he died. In the latter case he was rudely thrown overboard.

Over and above this frightful treatment, the mere chaining made the life of an outcast a veritable martyrdom. "When the merciless sea of Libya," says a captain of one of them,

“overtakes a galley along the Italian coast, when the howling north wind drives it hither and thither, and the Gulf of Lyons exposes it to the moist wind of Syria, everything combines to make the galley-ship a hell. The sad moaning of the men, the fearful cries of the crew, the terrible howls of the slaves, the creaking of the timber mingling with the clanking of the chains and the fury of the tempest, were sufficient to frighten the hardest heart. Rain, hail, lightning, frequently accompanied these violent storms, and the furious billows washing over the ship added a new terror to the situation.” In the summer, the sun darting his rays on the bare shoulders of the galley-slaves, the mosquitoes torturing them, and fetid odours from all sides varied their misery without diminishing it. So wretched was the condition of all, that even the officers could find no relief, and knew not where to take shelter.

At that time France had under the command of M. de Gondi a score of galleys, rowed by six thousand slaves, and manned by two thousand five hundred soldiers.

These galleys, stationed at Toulon, Marseilles, Aigues-Mortes, Narbonne, guarded the Mediterranean, by chasing Turkish corsairs and protecting the coast. But the fortresses of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries clearly show they were hardly sufficient. Every year M. de Gondi set sail from Toulon or Marseilles with eight, ten, or twelve well-armed galleys, and scoured the Mediterranean, visiting its parts and most secret creeks, capturing and sinking all pirate vessels. No details remain to us of these expeditions, but various fragments recently discovered prove what courage and activity the Admiral displayed in the years 1620, 1621, 1622. Only to cite the year 1620: we learn that M. de Gondi left Marseilles with seven well-armed galleys. He soon discovered, near Oran two pirate vessels, “which he fired on so furiously,” says the *French Mercury*, “that they were obliged to surrender. Forty Christians were found chained to the seats of these two ships, and there were a hundred and fifty armed Turks, whom they took captives.” Some days afterwards they came up with a large vessel that had Soliman Raïs, the famous pirate from Algiers on board, with forty pieces of cannon and two hundred soldiers. The Admiral pursued him so keenly for two days, that, no longer able to hold out, and fearing to fall into the hands of the Christians, he saved himself in a canoe, after burning the ammunition and abandoning his vessel. Towards the end of the same year, September, 1620, the Admiral returned to Marseilles

with his seven galleys intact, leading four Algerian vessels captive, having burned a fifth and sunk a sixth.

Such was the expedition of 1620. That of 1621 was more brilliant, but even it was surpassed by that of 1622. M. de Gondi got orders from the King to go direct through the Straits of Gibraltar with all his available force to support the French fleet about to attack La Rochelle. The inhabitants of this port had raised a fleet of fifty-six large ships, with which they were masters of the ocean, and daily made considerable captures. We shall not dwell on this expedition. Let us merely say that M. de Gondi displayed prodigies of skill and valour; that with light ships he harassed the enemy's heavy ones so much, that in the opinion of Admiral de Guise, he contributed to the success of this war more than anybody else, and earned for himself the reputation of being one of the most intrepid captains.

Under such circumstances, during the long absences of the Admiral amid the dangers to which he was exposed, what were they talking of at home in the Rue Pavée? Was it not of him, of his glory, of the soldiers that fell by his side, and of the unhappy galley-slaves, who, not to speak of musket-shot, were enduring such dreadful misery? How deeply stirred must have been the sensitive and tender heart of Mme. de Gondi, and how her feelings were echoed by Saint Vincent de Paul! Before embarking for Toulon and Marseilles, the galley-slaves made a more or less prolonged sojourn in Paris, where they came under the jurisdiction of M. de Gondi. Saint Vincent asked and obtained permission to be admitted into their dungeons. The seventeenth century had no mercy for criminals. Shut up in dark, damp, and unhealthy prisons, they were bound with iron chains to the walls, and their food was black bread and water. Long might they linger sickly before any notice was taken of them, and often vermin covered their sores, which exhaled an insupportable stench. The sight must indeed have been awful, for even Saint Vincent de Paul drew back horror-stricken, and his eyes filled with tears.

He went at once to M. de Gondi, who was then in Paris, and represented in the most touching terms the abandoned state of these unfortunate beings, adding that they were under his charge and that the responsibility before God was upon him.

Philippe-Emmanuel was an upright and good man. He declared his readiness to do everything in his power, but could see no remedy for so incurable an evil. But Saint Vincent had weighed the matter well, and proposed a simple and practical

plan, which was at once adopted. The saint was given full power. Going then among the outcasts, he encouraged them by his presence, consoled them by his piety, raised their hearts to God, and taught them to carry their cross in a spirit of atonement. The most repulsive disease, the most contagious sickness, did not affright him. Assisted by two young noble-hearted priests, M. Belin, the Count's chaplain at Villepreux, and M. Portail, the saint's first disciple in the work of the missions, he was charitable even to heroism. So great was the change he wrought among the galley-slaves, hitherto loaded with chains, that they were quietly transported to a large hospital which Saint Vincent had purchased and fitted up in the Rue Saint-Honoré. This institution was supported and visited by Mgr. de Gondî, Archbishop of Paris, the Admiral, his sister-in-law, the Marchioness of Meignelais, and the other distinguished ladies of the capital. Even the King wished to hear about these wonderful deeds of charity from M. de Gondî, and was so amazed at the piety, zeal and heroic devotedness of the saint, that to afford him an opportunity of extending his labours throughout the kingdom, he instituted in his favour the new office of Chaplain-General of the Galleys of France.

These are the terms of his commission :—

“PARIS, *February* 18, 1619.

“From the evidence of the Count de Joigny, Admiral of the Galleys of France, it has been shown to His Majesty to be necessary for the welfare and solace of the outcasts, who are at present, or shall hereafter be, in the said galleys, to select an ecclesiastic of probity and sufficient learning to be Chaplain-General, and to take precedence of all the other chaplains. His Majesty, sympathising with the outcasts, and desirous that they should draw spiritual profit from their corporal punishment, has, relying on the recommendation of the Count de Joigny, conferred on Vincent de Paul, priest, bachelor of theology, the said office of Chaplain-General of the Galleys of France, with an annuity of 600 livres, and all the rank and privileges enjoyed by the other officers of the fleet in the Levant. It is His Majesty's wish that the said Vincent de Paul as Chaplain-General should in rank and authority take precedence of all other chaplains, and so be treated on board the galleys, by virtue of the present commission, which His Majesty has deigned to sign with his own hand, and desired me, his Secretary of State, to do likewise.

(Signed)

“LOUIS.

“PHILIPPEAUX.”

On February 12, Saint Vincent, on entering his new office, took the oath before the Count de Joigny, His Majesty's Lieutenant-General in command of the Levant.

Fortified with this commission, which gave him admission and authority in every prison, Saint Vincent determined to visit them all. He commenced with Marseilles, the largest and worst, where veterans of vice, the most hardened criminals, were to be met with. Here he worked wonders by humility, gentleness and devotedness; and it was here, it is said, took place one of the most extraordinary events, not only in the life of Saint Vincent, but in the life of any saint.

Touched by the despair of a young outcast rudely torn away from his wife and children, the saint put on his chains and voluntarily took his place. However astounding it may seem, the fact is certain and cannot be doubted. All his biographers assert it, and the Church testifies to it in her solemn inquiry. The saint's humility, however, took such precautions to hide it, that some obscurity remains about the circumstances and the exact time it took place.

Let us see, in the first place, the testimony admitted by the Church in the process of the saint's canonisation. The résumé of these depositions are found in a special abstract prepared for the Pope by Jean Zuccherini, the sub-promoter of the faith. The witnesses—all persons worthy of credence—spoke, no doubt, from hearsay, for it was impossible to adduce eye-witnesses a hundred years after the event. But the testimony, clear and precise, evidently came from reliable sources, and places the fact beyond all doubt.

However, the best proof—one absolutely unanswerable—is that of Saint Vincent himself. One of his priests asked him, if it were really true that he had at one time taken the place of an outcast, and whether it was in consequence of that he had the swelling in his legs. What should so profoundly humble a man have done if it were not true? He would have exclaimed like Saint John, "*Et confessus est et non negavit, quia non sum ego Christus.*" Instead of saying emphatically, "No, it is not true; I never wore the chains of a galley-slave," he merely smiled and changed the conversation. Moreover, Clement XII., in the bull of canonisation, did not hesitate to mention the fact: "It is related that Vincent de Paul, after the example of Saint Raymond Nonnatus, became a slave. Seeing one of his brethren worn out with the heavy weight of his chains, and unable otherwise to relieve the unfortunate creature's agony, to release him from captivity Vincent himself became a slave."

If the fact is incontestable, it is not so with the time at which it occurred. Abelly, who writes only four years after the saint's death, does not connect it with Marseilles, but relates it without assigning any date, in the chapter on his virtues.<sup>1</sup> Collet, the most exact of his biographers, places it at Marseilles in 1622. He thinks, that to be more at liberty to make investigations, the saint came to Marseilles incognito, which is difficult to suppose.<sup>2</sup> Others, relying on the fact that the saint suffered for forty-five years from a swelling in his legs, date it as far back as 1615. Saint Vincent had been then two years in the family of De Gondi, and not unlikely he had gone to Marseilles with the Admiral of the Galleys, and this extraordinary act of charity could only have taken place after the Admiral had embarked. But there is no trace of this voyage in history. Finally, the bull of canonisation, in saying "that he delivered one of his companions from captivity," would seem to refer the event to the period of his slavery in Barbary. But there he was always a captive, never free, and consequently never in a position to renounce his liberty in favour of another. We must then adopt 1622, the date held by Collet, to which no serious objection can be raised, for everything tends to make it most probable—nay, so to speak, certain. As a matter of fact, Louis XIII. left Paris on March 20, 1622, to terminate his brilliant campaign of 1621. He set out from the Nantes side to see in what state was the royal fleet, composed of all the ships from Normandy and Brittany, and with which he intended attacking La Rochelle. Finding the fleet rather weak and badly equipped, he bodily determined on bringing to his aid, through the Straits of Gibraltar, the Mediterranean squadron. This had never been done before, and it was questionable whether those light ships could stand the sea and confront heavy ones. On receiving the King's orders, M. de Gondi immediately set out for Marseilles, to preside over the final preparations and to assume command. He brought with him his eldest son, Pierre, whom he intended to succeed him some day as Admiral of the Galleys, and whom he wished to receive his baptism of fire under his own eyes. Saint Vincent accompanied them, deeming it a convenient occasion to begin his visitation of the galleys as Chaplain-General. After the necessary preparations, M. de Gondi and his son put out to sea, bringing ten galleys manned by twelve hundred soldiers and rowed by three thousand slaves. As many more remained at Marseilles and Toulon, which were to be armed

<sup>1</sup> Abelly, vol. iii. chap. xi.

<sup>2</sup> Collet, vol. ii. p. 101.



immediately, and held ready to join the others on the first signal. What was there to prevent this extraordinary action of our saint from taking place within the six months that M. de Gondi was passing through the Straits of Gibraltar and fighting before La Rochelle ? They were manning the ten galleys that remained in port, and those who have read of the period, know how difficult it was to procure rowers. The sentences not being sufficient, the numbers were supplied from the ordinary prisons. Long penalties were ordered to be given up, and service on the galleys substituted. Under these circumstances a young man, guilty, no doubt, was brought off, but who at another time should not have been sent to the galleys. Our saint saw him sobbing and crying, because he had to leave his wife and children in misery, and this moved the saint to pity. Did he at once take his chains and fasten them round his feet ? This was impossible, and the saint was too adroit and too modest to do so. Abelly says that he was so touched at the miserable state to which the family was reduced, that he determined "to try every means of comforting them." This required time, and was not easy. "Not succeeding," continues Abelly, "he was interiorly urged by an extraordinary movement of charity, to put himself in this poor man's place, and set him free to assist his afflicted family." How did he effect this ? We know not. He must have employed the greatest skill that charity could suggest, but in what that consisted we are ignorant. What was there to prevent him, for such an object, to conceal his name, and even remove his soutane ? He had been on the ten galleys that were part of M. de Gondi's fleet. But was he also known on the ten that were being manned ? Could he not conceal his name and his dignity ? No doubt, a surprise from one of the officers was not impossible ; but if so, there are some deeds of this kind so noble, that we must forget and forgive them. The very nature of a noble action is to make its witnesses admirers, and, so to speak, co-operators. Now, what more sublime than to see a man delivering himself up for another, to see a priest through charity become a galley-slave and an outcast ? Such a sight dazzles us by its brilliancy, and forces us to turn aside in admiration.

His captivity, at any rate, did not last long. The saint was soon recognised, and hastened to leave Marseilles, more ashamed of his virtue than others are of their vice.

At the time that Saint Vincent returned to the family of De Gondi, great trials were filling with mourning that house

till then so brilliant and so happy. The first, on August 3, 1622, was the death of Cardinal Henri de Gondî, Bishop of Paris, and Prime Minister under Louis XIII. He had accompanied the King during the entire campaign of 1621 and 1622 as President of the Council, and it was while with him at the siege of Beziers that he was suddenly taken away when hardly fifty. He was a pious and amiable man, in whose life it is difficult not to feel the direct influence of Saint Vincent de Paul. Consecrated Bishop at twenty-four, possessing an immense fortune, made Cardinal and Prime Minister, he used all his wealth and influence in creating and developing a host of religious institutions. How Saint Vincent must have deplored the loss of such a bishop? Fortunately he was worthily replaced by a member of his own family, his brother Jean-François de Gondî, at first a Capuchin, and then Dean of Notre-Dame. This man, of very average ability and rather weak character, redeemed himself before posterity by contributing with all his influence to the work of the missions and the establishment of the two seminaries of Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet and of Saint-Lazare. We now see the providence of Saint Vincent's visits to the little parishes of Clichy and Châtillon, and his return into the family of De Gondî.

But sad as was the death of the Cardinal, it was nothing to the grief that awaited Mme. de Gondî. She had three sons. The second, Henri, god-son of the late Cardinal, was, like his mother, of fascinating beauty. Out hunting while only eight years old, his horse stumbled and threw him. Trying to disengage his foot, the horse kicked him on the head, and he was brought home dead to his mother. Saint Vincent was with her at the time, and we must always regret that no detailed account of the grief of such a mother, or of the consolation given by such a priest, has come down to us. She wept for this child till her death, which undoubtedly was hastened by the event.

Mme. de Gondî was mourning her second son scarcely a month, when another bitter trial filled her cup of sorrow to overflowing. Her eldest son, Pierre, who had accompanied the Admiral on the expedition against La Rochelle, having exhibited the ardour of his race and age, and having had his horse shot under him in the island of Ré, was grievously wounded. A musket shot had lodged in his shoulder and broken it. No doubt the joy of duty well done, the name of De Gondî carried so high, a mother's pride at seeing her son a hero, all this somewhat tempered Mme. de Gondî's grief.

But in what state was her eldest son to be brought home? After following her second to the grave, had she yet to mourn her first? And even if he recovered from his wound, was he to be a cripple for life? For days Mme. de Gondi endured unutterable anguish, to which she might have succumbed had not Saint Vincent been present to raise and sustain her courage. At last the Admiral arrived with his fond care, pale and feeble, yet fully convalescent and no longer in danger of life or limb.

It was after these events, in the winter of 1622-1623, that the Admiral and his wife, so pious and full of faith, took a resolution which had a woeful consequence on the Church. How was it that Saint Vincent, with all his influence and holiness, did not prevent this calamity? Their second son, Henri, who was killed, had been destined for the Church. He had already looked forward to the purple, and his family had still more eagerly coveted that dignity for him. Now that he was dead, they thought of his young brother, Francis, who had been intended for the army. There was no one less fitted for the priesthood. But were they to relinquish the Archbishopric of Paris the Cardinalate, that premier position in the Church held by a member of their family for eighty years? Let us not blame too severely the Admiral and his pious wife—the one, who was to die in so saintly a manner, and the other who, after his wife's death, was to abandon vast wealth and the highest titles to become a simple Oratorian, hidden in an humble cell. Let us rather impeach their generation, and recall the deeply felt and just testimony of their son, Cardinal de Retz.<sup>1</sup>

When the De Gondis had passed through the sorrows which we have been describing, Saint Vincent returned to a design which he had been contemplating for a whole year, namely, to give a general mission among the galleys under the Count de Joigny. These galleys, which were usually in the Mediterranean, according to arrangements at the Admiralty, had left it, on account of the exceptional circumstances before alluded to, and had contributed not a little to annihilate the insurgent fleet. Now that peace had been concluded, victory assured, and that the galleys were about to put into winter quarters, it seemed just the moment to give those unfortunate beings a mission, which should win for them peace in heaven, as their courage had done on earth. Saint Vincent applied

<sup>1</sup> See p. 33.

to Cardinal Sourdis, Archbishop of Bordeaux, a pious and zealous man, forming his life on that of Saint Charles. Our saint secured twenty religious, and placed them in couples on each galley. Directing the mission himself, he went from galley to galley, moving those unhappy creatures by his preaching, at once so simple, so humble and so mild, that he gained an extraordinary success. A Turk, who had resisted everybody else yielded to his preaching, and continued till death one of his most faithful and devoted followers.

This mission lasted nearly a month, and made a great stir. It brought to Bordeaux some of the saint's friends, who begged of him not to return to Paris without visiting his family. He was only a few leagues from them. It was twenty-two years since he saw his mother, and he had never met his nephews. When should so grand an opportunity turn up again? The saint allowed himself to be persuaded, and started for Pouy. It was there he had been baptised, received his first communion, and under the great oaks by the lake had passed his pious childhood. The aged priest who had blessed his entrance into the world, reposed under the shadow of the cross in the cemetery, but his place was now filled by the good Père Dussin, a relative of Saint Vincent's. It was with this priest that the saint lodged. His first act before saying mass in the church in which he had been made a Christian, was to renew his baptismal vows, and publicly humble himself for having kept them so badly. The good curé, to honour his guest, used to invite to dinner every day some of the saint's friends and the neighbouring curés. It was noticed that Saint Vincent never drank his wine without largely diluting it with water, and at night, like the Curé of Ars, he so altered his bed that he practically slept on the floor. When our saint was a child, the chapel of Notre-Dame de Buglose was only a ruin, and its statue concealed in the lake. Three years before Père Dussin had restored the statue, rebuilt the chapel, and re-established the pilgrimage. Saint Vincent resolved that it should be in this venerable sanctuary that he would assemble his friends and bid them adieu. A solemn pilgrimage was instituted, and the saint walked bare-footed, accompanied by his relatives and a large number of the townspeople. There he celebrated mass with extraordinary recollection, and addressed a few words to those present. After mass all his friends met round a modest repast at which the saint presided, and when it was over he rose to take leave of them. Instinctively they fell on their knees and

asked his blessing. "Oh, yes," he touchingly said, "I bless you, but I bless you poor and humble, and I ask for you from our Divine Lord the blessing of holy poverty. Never seek to leave the condition in which He placed you. This is my earnest recommendation, which I implore of you to transmit as an inheritance to your children. Adieu for ever." And saying these words he departed.

Up to this Saint Vincent had fairly well restrained his tears, but now that he was alone on the road they flowed freely. Standing and looking back to wish a last farewell to his humble village, his heart failed him. He thought of the relatives he was leaving in poverty, whom a word from him might comfort, and this gave him a feeling of remorse. This is how he spoke of his visit: "Having spent eight or ten days with my relatives, to instruct them in the ways of salvation, and detach them from the desire of possessing riches, I went so far as to tell them that they had nothing to expect from me, and that if I had chests of gold and silver I should not give them anything, because an ecclesiastic who possesses anything owes it to God and the poor. On the day of my departure I felt so much grief at leaving my poor relatives that I did nothing but weep all along the road." Thus bathed in tears the saint wavered in his resolution. Instead of leaving them in poverty, it would be so easy to assist them! Why not do so? "To these tears," he continues, "succeeded the thought of giving them assistance and putting them in a better condition, of giving this to one and that to another; my softened heart portioned out to them in this manner what I possessed and what I did not possess. I say it to my shame, and I say it because it may be that God permitted this to make me more sensibly perceive the importance of the evangelical maxim of which we are speaking. I was three months under subjection to this troublesome passion, of advancing the fortune of my brothers and sisters: it was the constant burden of my poor mind. However, when I found myself somewhat free, I prayed to God to deliver me from this temptation, and I besought Him so earnestly that He had pity on me and delivered me from these inordinate affections for my relatives; and though they have been depending on alms, and are so still, God has given me the grace to leave them to His providence, and to consider them more happy than if they had been in easy circumstances."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul.*

Here is illustrated in all its grandeur the exalted virtue of priests, which requires them to be, like Melchisedech, in absolute detachment, without father, mother, sister, or brother. Saint Vincent could never have reformed the clergy if he had not given them the example, and he spared no pains to show forth such acts of detachment, that they might be the better seen and appreciated. This was his conduct all through life. As he was one day sitting in his room, the brother announced that a peasant, rather poorly clad, and calling himself his nephew, wished to see him. At first the saint blushed, and asked one of his confrères to go. But in a moment he blushed for having blushed. Hastening to the door where his nephew stood, he tenderly embraced him, and taking him by the arm, brought him in. Then assembling the community, he presented the peasant, who was rather embarrassed, saying : "Gentlemen, this is one of the best specimens of my family," and turning to his nephew, he bade him salute the priests. During the day he treated him as a distinguished guest, according to the custom, and introduced him to all the grand visitors. But remorse for yielding to false shame remained in his heart, and he felt constrained to unburden himself at the next retreat. "Gentlemen, and my brothers," he said, "pray for this proud man, who wished to conceal his nephew in his room, because he was only a peasant and badly clad." As to his nephew, he was obliged to return as he came, on foot, and with ten crowns in his pocket. Saint Vincent had received this modest sum from the Marchioness de Meignelais, the only assistance he ever asked for his family.<sup>1</sup>

He treated similarly his other relatives, and discouraged their coming to Paris. "Do you think," said he one day, "that I do not love my relatives? Oh! certainly I love them; but we must listen to grace, and not to nature. We must rank first the most abandoned poor." On another occasion when he was spoken to about some of his relatives reduced to poverty by the war, "Behold," said he, "the state of my poor relations, in misery, absolute misery. I myself, had not God favoured me with a vocation, should be in poverty too. But what can be done? The goods of the community do not belong to me, and it would be bad example to dispose of them." Here was a man for half a century honoured with the confidence

<sup>1</sup> Maynard, vol. i. p. 16.

of the King, of the Queen, of the princes of the Church, and of the highest nobility, with immense sums of money passing through his hands, distributing millions to support whole provinces, and yet he never devoted a crown to his poor relations, though only cultivating the land, and often reduced in bad time, to the direst distress. When one is detached to this degree one has then a right to speak boldly, and say to priests, "Detach yourselves from everything."

## CHAPTER VII.

FOUNDATION OF THE WORKS OF THE MISSION—DEATH OF THE  
COUNTESS DE GONDI—HER HUSBAND ENTERS THE ORATORY  
—SAINT VINCENT RETIRES TO THE COLLÈGE DES BONSEN-  
FANTS—AFTER FIFTY YEARS' PREPARATION HE UNDERTAKES HIS GREAT WORKS.

1624-1625.

IT was after this visit, after the mission among the galleys, after his efforts to evangelise the poor people of Châtillon-les-Dombes, of Folleville, Montmirail, of Trévoux, and of Maçon, that the Congregation of the Priests of the Mission was founded. We presume to say that the company of priests, spread now over the entire world, devoted exclusively to the evangelisation of the poor country-people, was founded not by a priest, not by Saint Vincent de Paul, as is commonly thought. It was founded by a woman, and Saint Vincent would not contradict us. Not only was it not founded by him, but every artifice had to be used to induce him to place himself at its head. It was the angelic Mme. de Gondi who founded the Congregation of the Mission.

She had the heart of a priest and of an apostle. The thought that on her vast estates there were seven or eight thousand souls, ignorant, worldly, and forgetful of their salvation, tormented her day and night. What could be done to convert them and raise their minds to God? She thought of missions in each village which might be renewed every five years, and had already reserved for that end 16,000 livres. But where were the priests to be found who would accept so humble an employment? At first she applied to the Jesuits, but was refused. Next she turned to the Oratorians, but they were only newly-founded and destined for seminaries. She tried many other communities, but always unsuccessfully. Suddenly, amid so many fruitless endeavours, an idea struck her. Why go so far away? Had she not at her very hand all she could desire? Had not Saint Vincent laboured most successfully at Folleville, Villepreux, and Montmirail? Had he not attracted holy priests, even doctors of the Sorbonne, who were anxious to relinquish



the easy life of so many of their brethren, and to labour on missions for the salvation of souls? This, however, was transitory; was there no way of making it permanent? No doubt it was necessary to get priests of exceptional detachment, who would renounce preaching in cities; for after fashionable and learned audiences it would be difficult for them to accustom themselves to dull and heavy country-people. They should be priests, too, who would renounce all human ambition; for otherwise how could they devote themselves to the poor? The poor could be of no service to anybody, and very often when persons worked among them, the workers were regarded as incapable of anything else. But let it not be thought that mediocre men suffice among this class. For them distinguished men are sometimes more necessary than for the rich. The broad mind of Mme. de Gondi weighed all this, and she should have despaired, had she not relied on Saint Vincent, more humble than any one, more detached, more zealous, and so gifted in communicating to others the sacred fire that consumed himself.

Full of this idea, she spoke of it to M. De Gondi. Philippe-Emmanuel had not yet reached that degree of virtue to which we shall afterwards see him rise, nevertheless, like many good men in the world, charitable undertakings deeply appealed to him. He not only approved of his pious wife's design, but desired to co-operate. Her 16,000 livres he brought up to 45,000, and with this a beginning could be made, if only a free house could be obtained. Mme. de Gondi went to her brother-in-law, the Archbishop of Paris, and asked if among the establishments at his disposal there was any that might serve as a nucleus of the new Congregation.

Most opportunely there was an old college near the gate Saint-Victor, known as the Collège des Bons-Enfants, the rector of which was about to resign. This was at the disposal of the Archbishop. What better use could be made of it than to hand it over to Saint Vincent! It would be the cradle of a Congregation that would benefit the whole diocese.

Thus everything came to the aid of the new Congregation. The house was now given and the funds assured; the body was ready, and it only remained to breathe into it a soul. That soul was Saint Vincent, but who could induce him to accept such a charge? The three founders, M. and Mme. de Gondi, and the Archbishop of Paris, went together to him, in order the more effectually to overcome his humility. But they disquieted

themselves needlessly. The saint's humility was indeed profound, but here his charity prevailed. He was to have an opportunity of entirely devoting himself to his beloved poor, and nothing would be able to prevent him from doing that. He was to have power to collect around him holy priests exclusively occupied with the new work, and he desired nothing better. Like Saint John when he met our Lord, so now Saint Vincent exclaimed : "*In hoc ergo gaudium meum impletum est.*" He felt such ardour in realising the project that he was continually thinking of it, and so overjoyed was he that he feared he offended God. He went even to make a retreat at Soissons, that God might moderate his enthusiasm and the too sensible joy he felt in consecrating himself to the service of the poor. While on retreat he resolved to undertake nothing "as long as he was carried away with these ardent hopes and great plans." Here we see the eminence of his virtue. To fear seeking self in doing good; to shun gratifying self even in tending the wretched and miserable, in healing their wounds and ulcers—such sentiments God alone can inspire, and He alone can reward.

The deed of foundation bears date April 17, 1625. It was drawn up in the name of M. and Mme. de Gondi, in their house in the Rue Pavée. Saint Vincent hardly seems to have been present, but we perceive him dictating from a distance, and the deed of foundation only expresses the views he had slowly and deeply matured.

The deed at once points out the object of the work. "God having inspired M. and Mme. de Gondi for some years past with the desire of doing Him honour, as well on their own estates as elsewhere, they have considered that, since it has pleased His Divine Majesty to provide in His infinite mercy for the spiritual necessities of cities by the number of holy doctors and virtuous religious who preach and catechise therein, and who preserve in them a spirit of devotion, there remains only the poor country-people to be cared for. They think that this can be remedied by a pious association of certain ecclesiastics of known orthodoxy, piety, and fitness, who are willing to renounce preferment in cities, as well as all appointments and dignities in the Church, to apply themselves, under the bishops, simply and entirely to the salvation of these poor people; to pass from village to village at the expense of their common purse; to preach, instruct, exhort, and catechise the poor, and to bring them to a general confession, without taking

from them any payment or offering whatever, to the end that they may distribute without charge the gifts they have gratuitously received from the hand of God. To make provision for this end, the said Count and Countess, in thanksgiving for the benefits and graces which they have received, and still daily receive, from the same Divine Majesty ; to assist in the salvation of poor souls, which God so ardently desires ; to honour the mysteries of the Incarnation, Life, and Death of our Lord Jesus Christ ; out of love for His Most Holy Mother ; and, moreover, to strive to obtain grace to live well the rest of their days, that they together with their family may attain eternal glory—to this end the said Count and Countess have given as alms the sum or 45,000 livres, which they have delivered into the hands of M. Vincent, priest of the diocese of Acqs and licentiate in canon law.”

The conditions beautifully show forth the admirably practical mind of Saint Vincent de Paul. They are :—

“ 1. The said Count and Countess have given, and do give, to the said M. Vincent the power of electing and choosing within a year six ecclesiastics, or such a number as the revenue of the present endowment can support, whose orthodoxy, piety, good morals, and integrity of life are known to him, to labour in the said work under his direction as long as he may live ; and this is the express will and intention of the said Count and Countess, both on account of the confidence which they have in his management, and from the experience they have had of the good effected by the said missions, in which God gave him an especial blessing. But notwithstanding this direction, the said Count and Countess intend that the said M. Vincent shall make his continual and actual residence in their house, that he may continue to give them and their family the spiritual assistance which he has rendered them for so many years.

“ 2. The said forty-five thousand livres shall be so invested as to support the missionaries, and be held as their own ; and to perpetuate this work for the glory of God and the edification of the neighbour, on the death of the said M. Vincent, those who shall have been admitted, shall elect by vote his successor, whom they shall regard as Superior.

“ 3. The said Count and Countess shall remain joint founders of this work, and, with their heirs and successors of the same family, shall for ever enjoy the rights and privileges which are conceded and granted to patrons by the holy canons, except the right of nomination, which they have renounced.

"4. The said ecclesiastics shall devote themselves entirely to the care of the said poor country-people ; and to this end they shall bind themselves neither to preach nor administer any sacrament in cities which are the seats of bishops, archbishops, or courts of justice, except in case of extreme necessity ; they shall also expressly forego all charges, benefices, and dignities. . .

"5. That the said ecclesiastics shall live in community, under obedience to the said M. Vincent, and to their future Superiors after his death, under the name of the Company or Congregation of Priests of the Mission. Those who shall thereafter be admitted, shall be bound to go every five years through all the estates of the said Count and Countess, to preach, to hear confessions, to catechise, and to do all the good works aforesaid, and to employ the remainder of their time as they think best for the glory of God and the salvation of the neighbour, and to assist spiritually the poor outcasts, that they may turn to profit their bodily pains. Thus shall the said Count, as Admiral of the Galleys, satisfy the obligation by which he feels himself bound ; and this charity he intends to be perpetuated towards the convicts by the said ecclesiastics, for good and just considerations.

"6. That the said missions shall commence in October and be continued till June, when, having laboured for the nine months, the missionaries shall return home and employ their time in recollection and preparation for approaching missions, and in assisting the clergy. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

Such is the celebrated deed that emanated from the devotion and exalted faith of a Christian family, a deed that has given to the Church a new army of apostles, and which, for more than thirty years, served as its only rule, and is embodied in the rule still. When, towards the end of his life, Saint Vincent, after long years of meditation, experience, and prayer, determined to draw up the constitutions of the Congregation, he adopted all the principal points of this deed, and only added details.

While Mdme. de Gondi was thus employed in beginning the work of the missions, she was also completing another work, to which for a long time she had devoted herself, namely, the conversion of her husband. It may be a surprise to use the word conversion, after all that has been said of Philippe-Emmanuel de Gondi. It is not, indeed, that his faith or morals were ever shipwrecked. He worshipped the holy spouse that God had given him, and even amid the perils of war and of the court he

<sup>1</sup> Maynard, vol. I, p. 344.

ever remained most affectionately devoted to her. But he was the possessor of an immense fortune, bore a great name, and like all his family, full of ambition, was immersed in all the intrigues and pleasures of the court. It was from this that Mme. de Gondi wished to withdraw him, and to induce him to devote himself more seriously to heavenly things. With this object in view she was not satisfied with having brought to her house and retained with difficulty such a priest as Saint Vincent. Sweetly and prudently she introduced others to her husband. She brought about an interview with M. de Bérulle without her husband suspecting it, and likewise with her great friend the Carmelite, Mother Margaret of the Blessed Sacrament, the second daughter of Mme. Acarie. The latter had not yet left the world, but before entering the Carmelites as an humble lay-sister, was preceded there by her three daughters. The eldest was prioress at Orleans, the second in Paris, and the third at Chartres. The three were endowed with extraordinary gifts, but the second surpassed all, even her mother. "Mme. Acarie," said the Marchioness of Meignelais, "was a saintly soul, but her daughter, Mother Margaret, was even more so." Père Binet was of the same opinion. She worked miracles and had the gift of prophecy. The most distinguished persons came to her—M. de Bérulle, her director; Anne of Austria, who sought her counsel; and Saint Chantal, the moment of whose death she had predicted. To this holy soul Mme. de Gondi from time to time brought her husband, that his heart might be moved by such sanctity. In the beginning M. de Gondi's visits were short. He went merely to please his wife, and his sister, the Marchioness of Meignelais. By degrees, however, he began to like going, and this austere nun who shunned the parlour, while presuming to tell even Anne of Austria not to come too often, distracting the sisters by her pomp, always welcomed M. de Gondi. One day he met there M. de Bérulle. "See," said the holy nun, "M. de Bérulle, whom you do not know now, but a day shall come when you will know him. He will be the most efficacious instrument in the hands of God for your salvation. You laugh at me now, but one day you will see that I was right."—"I have often heard that incident about my father," said Cardinal de Retz, "since he joined the Oratory; but I have heard it even when a child, long before he thought of entering."

Another time this holy nun having spoken to M. de Gondi of the necessity of leading a Christian life in the world, the Admiral

replied as all of his rank and occupation usually do, by dwelling on the difficulties of living as a Christian amid so many temptations. The good nun only urged him all the more to break the bonds which he felt so dangerous ; but not prevailing on him, she said : " You shall not have your own way, God will obtain the mastery , what you will not voluntarily do to please Him, He will effect as your Sovereign. He will not constrain you, but will sweetly attract you by His mercy, so that you will yield to His inspirations. He will take your good wife out of life at such a time, and after her death will bring you into the Oratory, where you will receive holy orders and be ordained priest. Reflect on this seriously." " M. de Gondi's state of mind at the time," continues Cardinal de Retz, " made him look upon all this as visionary, and regard what was said as altogether outside of the range of probability. He simply laughed and thought no more of it, and some months afterwards started in his official capacity for Marseilles."

But he carried with him what was to conquer and induce him to lead a life wholly Christian. At sea commanding the galleys, he kept up a correspondence with Mother Margaret, in which she constantly reminded him to think of the salvation of his soul. He had such a veneration for her, that in a storm he invoked her as a saint, and having been saved, he everywhere proclaimed that it was owing to her prayers.

One would think that Mme. de Gondi was awaiting two great events before her departure from this world—the foundation of the Congregation of the Mission, and the conversion of her husband. In truth she never belonged to the world. Her delicate body hardly sustained her, and her ardent soul completely carried her away. She well knew that continually visiting the sick and watching by their beds had wasted her strength, but yet she would not diminish her labours. To ease her body would only have been to mortify her soul, and so she continued visiting, though becoming every day more weak. At last she was compelled to give up, for her strength completely gave way, and what is now known as anæmia was bringing her slowly but surely to the grave. She recognised this, but did not complain. Her soul was already in heaven. We have no details of her last moments ; all we know is that the great wish of her life was granted—she had Saint Vincent by her death-bed. Sustained and encouraged by his prayers, reassured by his words, full of faith and confidence in God, she breathed her last on June 23, 1625. A great soul, delicate and pure, but

scrupulous and timid, she was worthy to receive the blessing of being supported and encouraged in her last hours by so great a saint. By her will she was to be interred beside her intimate friend, Mother Margaret, in the Carmelite Church in the Rue Chapon. Saint Vincent accompanied the remains there himself, attended all the ceremonies, sang the requiem mass, recited the last prayers, and only retired after having deposited his sacred trust beside her friend Mother Margaret.

We must ever regret that so little is known of so pure a life, the perfect model of a lady of the world. But Abelly has discovered the reason. "The history of so holy a life might have filled a large volume, to the great edification of posterity, but Saint Vincent alone could supply its best pages, having known better than anybody else Mme. de Gondi's eminent qualities and singular virtue. His humility, however, always made him hide the good in which he had co-operated. This was the reason he invariably evaded speaking of Mme. de Gondi, to conceal his own co-operation; for that holy soul did hardly anything of importance for the honour and glory of God, in which Saint Vincent had not taken part, and thus merited a share in her praise. This it was he feared most, and avoided as much as possible."<sup>1</sup>

M. de Gondi did not assist at this sad ceremony. Death had been so sudden, that there was no time to inform him, and he had no idea of its approach. Saint Vincent thought it his duty—and even if it were not, his heart, his deep and holy affection for the Admiral would have urged him—to convey the sad intelligence in person. Moreover, it may have been the dying wish of Mme. de Gondi. In those days it was a long journey from Paris to Marseilles. The saint set out with a heavy heart, thinking, as he went along, how he was to break the news of so insupportable a trial to M. de Gondi. I have already said, but must repeat, that to the affection the Admiral bore his amiable and charming wife, was added another feeling which exalted his love to very reverence. The thought of being for ever separated from her had never entered his mind. Saint Vincent knew it was so, and that rendered his present mission all the more trying. After long prayer he appeared before M. de Gondi. The unexpected arrival of the holy priest was a shock in itself. "Well," said Saint Vincent, to break the anxious silence, "are we not ready to do the holy will of God?" Then, gently, with infinite

<sup>1</sup> Abelly, vol. i., p. 71.



delicacy, he told of Mme. de Gondi's sickness, last moments and death, so precious, so Christian and resigned. He did all this in such a manner that to listen was to be consoled. Nevertheless, the wound was fatal, and in being separated from his holy spouse, M. de Gondi felt he was separated from everything.

The saint had brought with him the last will and testament of the deceased, and handed it over to the Admiral. One of the clauses ran thus : "I beg of M. Vincent, for the love of our Lord, and His Blessed Mother, never to leave the Admiral's house, nor on his death to depart from my children. I likewise ask my husband to retain him for himself and the children, urging them to remember and follow his holy instructions, knowing well, if they do, the advantage it will be to their souls, and the blessings it will bring on themselves and the whole family." This clause was too dear to the heart of M. de Gondi not to insist, with all his strength, to secure so great a benefit. But Saint Vincent felt his hour had come, that Mme. de Gondi's death had released him from his pledge. It was now time to regain his liberty and be free to devote himself to the great works with which God was inspiring him. He respectfully represented this to the Admiral, who yielded to the saint's arguments.

Philippe-Emmanuel, moreover, was not to remain long in the world. The love he had for his holy spouse was such as could not be compensated on earth. Jesus Christ alone could replace her. He resigned therefore, his office of Admiral of the Galleys in favour of his eldest son ; and placed his second, the future Cardinal de Retz, with the Jesuits, to complete his education. Thus free, and remembering Mother Margaret's predictions, he went to M. de Bérulle to be received into the Oratory. After a long and serious trial at the hands of the prudent superior which was accepted with humility by the courageous novice, he received tonsure and the habit. Later on he was ordained priest, celebrated his first mass before a large concourse of people, and then retired to hide himself in a solitude so profound that nothing could tear him from it, not even the prospect of being made a cardinal or the successor of M. de Bérulle as Superior-General of the Oratory. He completely disappeared, and we can hardly penetrate the obscurity in which he desired to be forgotten, living in humility, devoted to the hidden life, wearing a hair shirt, often fasting on bread and water, and exciting the admiration of



Saint Vincent, to whom he remained tenderly attached till death.

While M. De Gondi was abandoning the world for the Oratory, Saint Vincent was retiring to the Collège des Bons-Enfants, with M. Portail, his first and faithful disciple, and some other holy priests, to prepare for his great works. He was now fifty. How admirable are the ways of God! When he wishes to make a doctor, He leads him to a university, and at the feet of some famous master, rears for the world a Saint Bonaventure or a St. Thomas. Is it a servant of the poor He wishes to raise up, then He adopts another course. He causes him to be born in poverty, to tend flocks in his childhood, and to grow amid privation and sacrifice. Such was to be the first school of Saint Vincent de Paul, and his second, his captivity in Tunis. After having eaten the bread of the poor he was to carry the chains of the slave. Thrice sold like a beast in a public market-place, he remained for three entire years in this rough school, and learned on the burning sands of Africa, and in the hard labours of captivity, what were the sorrows and humiliations of certain classes of society.

Yet this was not enough. He had eaten the bread of the poor, but in the honest poverty of his father's home. He had carried the captive's chains, but of an unhappy captive in the prison of Tunis. He had yet to lift the chains of an outcast. Hitherto he had known only the sorrows of poverty; he had yet to learn its shame that he might feel all its sting. But how was he to descend into the prison of the galley-ship, those abominable, infectious dens, full of blasphemy and sin? Was it to be as a priest, as a benefactor, to console these unfortunate wretches? No, for then he should be too much above them and not sufficiently of themselves. He will descend as an outcast with a weight round his ankle, an oar in his hands, and clad in the ignominious garb of a galley-slave. Such is the will of God. It is necessary that this great saint may know poverty from all its aspects and be able to say with our Lord: "We have not a high priest, who cannot have compassion on our infirmities; but one tempted in all things like as we are, yet without sin." *Tentatum autem per omnia.*

At the same time that God was leading Saint Vincent through these depths of poverty, as a great master after teaching the lower grades then turns to higher things, in like manner God was guiding our saint into the castles of the nobility, the rich salons of the gentry, and to the very palaces of kings, so that

when he commenced his great works he had not only gold and silver, riches and sympathy, but pious and illustrious co-operators in all grades of society.

Around him were gathered the noble and saintly Mme. de Gondi, the Marchioness of Meignelais, Mme. Acarie, and Mme. de Bérulle, who aided his first efforts. There, too, were the Duchess d'Aiguillon, Mme. Goussault, Mme. Herse, Mme. Lamoignon, Mme. Miramion, even nobler by their magnanimity than by their blood. Likewise, by his side he had Philippe-Emmanuel de Gondi, President Molé, Baron de Renty, Commander Sillery, and by no means to be forgotten that zealous group of the first Priests of the Mission, as well as the angelic Sisters of Charity, with Mdle. le Gras at their head. Finally, there were all those who, by supporting his last efforts, had enabled him to complete his great work for the glory of the Church, and the salvation of society through the virtue of charity.

## BOOK II.

### SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL UNDERTAKES THE REFORM OF THE CLERGY

#### CHAPTER I.

SAINT VINCENT IS ESTABLISHED IN THE COLLÈGE DES BONS-  
ENFANTS—SAINT-LAZARE—BEGINNING OF THE CONGRE-  
GATION OF THE MISSION.

1625—1628

As we pass down the Rue Saint-Victor in Paris, at No. 36, we see an old house with a number of little windows. The street ends abruptly and shuts out of sight the old gate that was there ten years ago. To this house Saint Vincent came in 1625. He had only M. Portail with him, his first and dearest disciple, who, born in Beaucaire in 1590, fourteen years after Saint Vincent, came to Paris in 1610, at the age of twenty, in order to prosecute his studies at the celebrated university. On his arrival he providentially met our saint, and immediately placed himself under his direction. Endowed with great innocence, thirsting for humility and poverty, he felt his soul expand under the influence of the servant of God, and resolved never to leave him. On his side our saint became attached to the young ecclesiastic, and though as yet ignorant of what use he should make of him later on, already treated him as a friend in whom he could place the greatest confidence. During his visit to Marseilles in 1622, to Bordeaux and Mâçon in 1623, he confided to M. Portail the care of "his dear galley-slaves" in Paris, and when in the beginning of the latter year he was given the Collège des Bons-Enfants, not being able to go there himself, he sent him to keep house. The saint only joined him in 1625, and henceforth for thirty-five years they were not to be separated. The one was the head, the other the hand; the one creating the works, the other directing them. M. Portail was as humble a disciple as Saint Vincent was a master, and both were burning with the most holy zeal for the glory of God and the relief of the poor.

Saint Vincent had scarcely settled down in the Collège des Bons-Enfants when he wished to begin the missions. Being only two, they engaged a good priest, M. Gambart, and paid him thirty crowns a year for his services. Nothing is more touching than their first missions. They were accustomed to go and receive the Archbishop's blessing; then after putting everything in order in the old Collège des Bons-Enfants, they carefully closed the doors, and not being able to keep a servant left the key with a neighbour. They set off, each carrying his knapsack on his shoulder. The poorest villages were preferred, and often they slept on straw. God blessed such poverty. "We used to go," said the saint, "cheerfully and simply, sent by the bishops to evangelise the poor, just as our Lord did. I had only one sermon—on the fear of God—but I turned it in a thousand ways. Such was our condition, when some ecclesiastics, witnessing the blessings God bestowed on our labours, asked and obtained permission to join us. O Saviour! who ever thought that we should become what we are now? If anybody said so then, I should have thought he was ridiculing me. Nevertheless, it was thus God wished to lay the foundation of the little Company. Well, then, do you call that human of which no man had ever thought? Neither I nor poor M. Portail ever thought of such a thing; alas! we were far from it."<sup>1</sup>

So great were the consolations which God bestowed on the first missions, that the saint could not tear himself away from them. Only when worn out with fatigue he returned to Paris for a little rest. "It seemed," said he, "as though the gates of the city ought to fall upon and crush me; and seldom did I return from the mission without this thought coming into my mind. The reason of this was that I seemed to hear within me some one saying: 'You are going back, while there are other villages expecting the same assistance which you have just rendered to this or to that. If you had not gone thither, it is probable that such and such persons should have died in the state in which you found them, and have been lost and damned. If you have found such and such sins in this parish, do you not think that similar abominations are committed in the neighbouring one, where the poor people expect a mission? And you are going back, you are leaving them! If they die in the meanwhile, and die in their sins, you will be in some measure the cause of their ruin, and you ought to fear lest God should punish you.'"<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Conferences," p. 287.

*Id.* p. 259.

Full of these thoughts he multiplied prayers to make up for the missions when temporarily interrupted. He used to go with his disciples to celebrated sanctuaries, to implore the spirit of humility and poverty. "The Congregation, still in its infancy, being composed of only three or four, went to Montmartre (with the exception of the miserable man now speaking, he being indisposed) and recommended itself to God, through the intercession of the holy martyrs, that it might enter into the practice of poverty, then and since so well observed by a great portion of the community. O Saviour of my soul! give us grace only to wish for and possess you alone."<sup>1</sup>

At the end of a year two more joined them. M. François du Coudray, born at Amiens, a doctor of the Sorbonne, a Hebrew scholar, and familiar with many languages, was attracted by the poverty and humility of the saint; and M. Jean de la Salle, likewise from Picardy, a man of extraordinary prudence and incomparable detachment. The following year, 1627, four others came: M. Jean Beçu, of the diocese of Amiens, aged thirty-four; M. Lucas, of the diocese of Paris, who was not yet a priest; M. Brunet, from Riom, in Auvergne, noble-minded, but delicate; and M. Horgny, from Noyon, the youngest of all, and who was destined to survive the saint, and to administer to him the last sacraments. Seven in all: it was a poor beginning, and looked like a failure. How often his disciples were discouraged! Vincent, on the contrary, rejoiced. He wrote to M. Portail, October 16, 1635, on the arrival of the last six, who after ten years had brought the number of his disciples up to thirty-three: "The number who have joined since your departure is six. O sir, how I fear the increase and spread of the little Company, and how much reason we have to praise God for honouring the fewness of the disciples of His Son!"

At the head of this little band Saint Vincent continued to extend his missions. Unfortunately we have few details. The saint's letters, which should have thrown light on this period, are all lost. We know, however, that he and his disciples went as far on one side as Chelles, Verneuil, Croissy, Maubuisson, Passy, and Beauvais, and on the other as far as Mesnil, Villeneuve-Saint-George and Lyons, and perhaps Châtillon-les-Dombes. In 1627, two years only after beginning, they had given missions throughout four southern provinces. "I am returning," wrote a well-known abbé, "from an extended tour in four provinces. I have already told you of the good effected

<sup>1</sup> "Conferences," p. 572

everywhere by your holy Congregation, working for the instruction and edification of the poor country-people. In truth, I do not believe there is anything in God's Church more edifying, and more worthy of those who bear the character of Jesus Christ. We should beseech God in prayer to render permanent an undertaking so advantageous to souls, for whose welfare few of those consecrated to God work as they ought."<sup>1</sup>

The winter was especially the time for missions, for the cold interrupted labour and afforded the poor country-people some spare time. During the summer it was the harvest and vintage time, and then the missionaries studied theology and prepared their sermons. In 1628 Saint Vincent wrote from Beauvais:—

"How is the Congregation going on? Is each one well disposed and contented? Are they observing the few rules, studying and discussing questions among themselves? Is there regular observance? I beg of you, sir, to see that all this be carefully attended to, and that they endeavour to thoroughly understand the *Small Becanus*.<sup>2</sup> We cannot exaggerate the utility of that little book. It has pleased God to make use of me, miserable wretch though I am, for the conversion of three persons since I left Paris. I must always acknowledge that sweetness, humility, and patience in treating those poor, misguided people are, as it were, the soul and life of such blessed results. I spent two days in converting one; the other two did not take me so long. I desire very much to say this to my own shame, so that the little company may see that if it pleased God to use the most ignorant and miserable of them all, He will also use each one of them, and more efficaciously too."<sup>3</sup>

For six years this life, so humble and fruitful, had lasted, when one day, M. de Lestocq, curé of Saint-Laurent, in Paris, introduced to our saint an excellent religious, Père Adrien le Bon. He was superior of a community of Canons-Regular of Saint Victor, living at Saint-Lazare, an old leper hospital on the road from Paris to Saint-Denis. This rich priory, with large enclosure, splendid gardens, magnificent buildings, but now unoccupied, was founded more than two centuries before, in 1404, by the piety of the faithful, as an asylum for lepers. At this time there were no lepers, and no corporal or spiritual works of charity were carried on. In it was a community of Canons-Regular of Saint Victor, but they were only eight, living at

<sup>1</sup> Collet, p. 131. <sup>2</sup> A compendium of theology written by Father Bécan, S.J.

<sup>3</sup> "Letters," vol. i. p. 22.

their ease, and not in harmony with their superior, who was anxious for a more regular life. Troubled and disquieted, wishing to withdraw, and inquiring if these magnificent buildings could not be utilised for some charitable institution, he consulted his neighbour and friend, M. de Lestocq, curé of Saint-Laurent. "Oh!" said the latter, "this thought can only come from God, who has raised up those good missionaries." He then related to him what we have already seen: the poor evangelised, bad confessions repaired, and all the spiritual and corporal wants of the poor country-people supplied. "However," he added, "come with me and judge for yourself. I desire especially that you should see their superior, a man completely devoted to God alone."

They at once went together to the Collège des Bons-Enfants. After the usual greetings, Père le Bon said to Saint Vincent, that hearing the good work the little Company was accomplishing, he should be delighted to co-operate with it, and for that end came to offer him the priory of Saint-Lazare. On hearing this, which should have thrown anybody else into an ecstasy of joy, the humble Vincent remained silent. He did not know what to say. "Why, sir, you are trembling," said M. le Bon. "It is true, Father," replied Saint Vincent; "your proposal frightens me, and it seems so far above us, that I could not think of it. We are merely poor priests, living humbly, with no other object than to serve the poor country-people. We are very grateful to you, Father, for your good-will towards us, and we thank you very humbly, but permit us to decline your kind offer."<sup>1</sup>

So much humility touched Père le Bon. He felt that he was in the presence of a priest far superior to those with whom he was acquainted, and becoming more and more desirous of realising his intentions, begged of Saint Vincent not to finally close the matter, but to take six months to consider.

Six months passed, and Père le Bon, accompanied by M. de Lestocq, returned to the Collège des Bons-Enfants. Both renewed their entreaties, and conjured Saint Vincent to accept the priory. Père le Bon felt inspired by God to give it to him, and the curé of Saint-Laurent, a resolute and practical man, pointed out to him the advantages of accepting it. "Since my first visit," said Père le Bon, "I have obtained the consent of my religious; all that is wanted now is yours; one word from you and the whole matter is concluded." Saint Vincent

<sup>1</sup> Maynard, vol. i. pp. 370-371.

remained unshaken. "You see how few we are," he replied. "The little company has only begun. This situation and this humble house suit us. I do not like to be talked of, and the affair would make a noise. Moreover, we do not deserve this favour ; leave us in the obscurity and silence that befit us."

Upon this the bell rang for dinner, and Père le Bon, desiring to change the conversation, said to the saint, "May I have the honour of dining with you and your community?" to which the saint assented, with his usual suavity and humility. The modest behaviour of the missionaries, the reading during the meal, the order, everything so pleased Père le Bon that he conceived such a veneration and love for them that he left with the determination of succeeding in his generous design. Père le Bon returned more than twenty times within the following six months, till it came to this, that being a great friend of Saint Vincent's, he told him many times that he was resisting the Holy Ghost, and that he should have to answer before God for his refusal, inasmuch as by this means he might establish a "Congregation complete in all respects."

M. de Lestocq could not restrain his impatience. "I could have carried M. Vincent," said he, "on my shoulders to Saint-Lazare, and won him over by the beauty and advantages of the place ; but he was insensible to exterior things, and during the eighteen months while the negotiations were going on, he never once visited Saint-Lazare."

Even the gentle and amiable Père le Bon lost patience. After a year of endeavours, he said one day to Saint Vincent : "What kind of a man are you ? If you will not listen to us in this matter, tell us at least of whom do you take counsel ? Who is there in whom you have confidence ? What friend have you in Paris to whom we may refer to get the question settled ? I do not fear his decision, for there is no one that wishes you well, who would not advise you to accept my offer. Agree, at least, to submit to his decision." Driven to this last resource, Saint Vincent named his confessor, Doctor Duval, and promised to obey him as holding the place of God.

Doctor Duval was one of the most distinguished priests in Paris, a great theologian, orator, and even more virtuous than talented. He was Saint Vincent's confessor, was praised and admired by Saint Francis de Sales, consulted by Saint Chantal, Mother Madeleine, and Mme. Acarie ; in the opinion of Cardinal Perron, was the most enlightened man to solve cases of conscience, to calm interior trials, and of whom Saint Vincent



himself said : " In him everything is holy." This learned priest did not hesitate to decide that Saint Vincent should accept the offer. Humble and obedient as a child, the saint at once went to see the house which for eighteen months he had refused to visit, and in a few hours everything was settled.

At the end of the garden, in cells, were five or six idiots, whom the religious, to fulfil as far as possible the intention of the founders, had received and cared. They were shown to Saint Vincent, who at once was moved to tears. It is this circumstance, perhaps, that finally determined him to accept the priory of Saint Lazare.

But let us continue. Père le Bon not only wished to give his house to Saint Vincent, in order to utilise in works of charity what was intended for the lepers, but he also wished to reform his community by association with our saint and his disciples. For this end he proposed that the two communities should form one. The disciples of Saint Vincent should wear the habit and cowl like the Canons-Regular, should take indiscriminate rank in choir, and sleep in the same dormitory. " Your disciples will not lose," said he to Saint Vincent, " and my religious cannot escape the salutary influence of so much silence, regularity, and modesty. Admiration will soon pass on to imitation."

Saint Vincent was too prudent and experienced to accede to such a request, which was more likely to transform the missionaries into canons than the canons into saints. He decidedly refused the habit, meeting in choir, and sleeping in the same dormitory. " Our rule," said he, " is to keep silence from night prayer till after dinner the next day ; we then have an hour's conversation, and silence is again observed till after supper, when another hour of recreation is given. Then follows the solemn silence, which is kept so rigorously that it is only broken in case of absolute necessity, and even then what is said should be uttered in the fewest words and in a low tone. Now," he added, " whoever robs a community of this, introduces indescribable disorder and confusion. This has made a holy person say that a community which observes silence exactly, will also exactly observe the other rules ; while, on the contrary, in a community where silence is not observed, it is impossible that the rest of the rules be kept. Now, Sir, there is great reason to fear that these gentlemen are unwilling to bind themselves to this, and were they not to do so, we should only destroy this practice which is so necessary, and which we have observed up to the present as well as possible."

Père le Bon, whose conduct throughout the whole affair was uniformly admirable, yielded, and everything being arranged, a settlement was drawn up, dated January 7, 1632, between Adrien le Bon and his religious of Saint-Lazare on the one hand, and Vincent de Paul and his disciples on the other.

The deed begins thus: "Leprosy not being so frequent as formerly (at present not a single leper being in Saint-Lazare), it is deemed conformable with the donors' intention to apply the revenues of the priory for the spiritual welfare of the poor country-people, living at a distance from cities, and infected with the leprosy of sin. Now since the Priests of the Mission have already devoted, and are at present devoting themselves to this excellent work with great fruit it will be well to co-operate in establishing and increasing them, so that they may more commodiously sustain and continue their exercises and labours. Consequently, the religious of Saint-Lazare, with the good pleasure of the Pope, of the Archbishop of Paris, of the King and Parliament, resign the said priory and annex it for ever to the Congregation of the Mission." Such were the motives which made Père le Bon offer his priory to Saint Vincent. After this introduction the deed proceeds: "1. As to the prior, he shall retain for life his residence and rank as formerly. He shall be free to attend at the services, chapter, and refectory; to have a pension for life secured upon the revenues of the priory, the property of the company, and two estates for which Père de Gondî (formerly Admiral of the Gallies) would go security. 2. As to the religious, they shall receive an annual pension of five hundred livres each, guaranteed also by Père de Gondî, of which two hundred should be deducted, if they preferred to live in common with the missionaries. Consequently they were free to remain in Saint-Lazare as formerly, on condition that they should be subject to the jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Paris, the pension being likewise paid if they wished to live elsewhere. 3. Medical treatment for the prior and religious was to be at the expense of the Congregation of the Mission, also sepulture with the ceremony due to benefactors. Anniversary service was to be perpetual for the prior, and one year for each religious."

We may notice here with joy and gratitude the signature of Philippe-Émmanuel, who having joined the Oratory was known as Père de Gondî. Having retained his property he went security for his old and ever dear friend Vincent de Paul. His brother, Jean François de Gondî, Archbishop of Paris, did not manifest less gratitude nor faithfulness. The day after the

settlement, January 8, 1632, he ratified it, beginning with a magnificent eulogium on Saint Vincent: "God, in His great mercy, has raised up in our day, in this kingdom of France, M. Vincent de Paul and his disciples truly apostolic men and sincere lovers of Christian humility, who, by a wholly divine inspiration, leave the cities where a great number of priests, both secular and regular are to be seen working for the salvation of souls, and go out into the different villages of our diocese. They seek solely the interests of Jesus Christ by preaching, not according to human wisdom. but in the manifestation of spirit and prayer. They exhort the people to make general confessions and to frequent communion. They instruct the ignorant, correct and remove immorality. By our authority they establish in each parish the association of charity, and prepare the people to profitably receive our visitations; in short, they urge them by word and example, to shun vice and embrace virtue, as almost all the great ones of this kingdom will bear witness."

The Archbishop continues: "It was then our duty to give thanks to the Author of all good for having sent us such useful co-operators, as it likewise behoved our pastoral solicitude to beg of the same great and merciful God not to allow them to want for anything. God in His infinite mercy has heard and granted our prayers. For a long time we had been seeking in vain a fixed and permanent establishment for them, when a priest truly zealous for the salvation of souls, Père le Bon, and the religious of his priory, witnessing the abundant fruit reaped by these missionaries, asked our concurrence in the design of uniting the leper hospital of Saint-Lazare with the Congregation of the Mission. Now, thoroughly convinced that all grades of society, but especially country towns and villages, shall derive benefit from this institution, we accede to this opportune request, in union with the good pleasure of the Pope and King, and subject to the conditions agreed upon by the two parties. It is our wish, moreover, that we and our successors should enjoy as before in Saint-Lazare full jurisdiction and authority, with the right of spiritual and temporal visitation; that the priests of the mission should recite the Divine Office in choir, fulfil the foundations, continue to receive lepers, and that at least twelve priests should reside there, who should in turn, at the expense of the Congregation, go through the villages of our diocese, remaining in them, as necessity required, one or two months. Lastly, during quarter-tense of each year, and without interfering

with the missions, they should receive the ordinands of the diocese of Paris sent by us, and maintain them gratuitously for the fifteen days during which they make the spiritual exercises."

Saint Vincent immediately took possession of Saint-Lazare. The Archbishop of Paris wished to install him, in order to manifest in his diocese the esteem and affection he had for the humble priest. We have not the official report of this solemn installation. The memoirs of the time merely state that everything passed off most satisfactorily.

Now that all these things were concluded, it would seem that Saint Vincent was to enjoy in peace that house of Saint-Lazare, which he had such difficulty and showed such detachment in accepting. But there are some who grumble at everything. It was denied that Père le Bon had the power to give up Saint-Lazare, and Saint Vincent was threatened with a lawsuit if he did not leave at once. At the very mention of the lawsuit, our saint, who abhorred disputes, declared himself willing to withdraw. Fortunately, prudent persons intervened, and showed him that it was a matter which concerned the glory of God, the salvation of souls, the relief of the poor, and the future of a Congregation that would do immense good for the Church. Hence he allowed the lawsuit to go on. While the case was being argued in court, he remained in the chapel, fervently praying on his knees at the foot of the altar. He implored God not that he might win, but that justice might prevail, and to grant him entire resignation to His holy will. During his long prayer he asked himself what he should most regret if he lost the lawsuit. It would be neither the large buildings, the beautiful enclosure, the rich priory, nor its many advantages to his rising community. There was only one thing dear to his heart and which would be difficult for him to abandon—the poor idiots in the cells at the end of the garden.<sup>1</sup>

He said this with an "artless simplicity" to a confidant—a simplicity and a sublimity that went well together.

<sup>1</sup> Abelly, vol. i. p. 103.

## CHAPTER II

RETREATS FOR THE ORDINANDS—THE TUESDAY CONFERENCES  
—COMMENCEMENT OF THE REFORM OF THE CLERGY.

1628-1635.

IN the deed of Mgr. Jean François de Gondi, authorising Saint Vincent to take possession of Saint-Lazare under certain conditions, we notice the following : “ Lastly, during quarter-tense of each year, and without interfering with the missions, M. Vincent de Paul and his disciples shall receive the ordinands of the diocese of Paris sent by us, maintaining them gratuitously for the fifteen days during which they make the spiritual exercises.” Who introduced this clause of such fundamental importance in the history of Saint Vincent de Paul and that of the Church of France ? Was it Mgr. de Gondi who thought of it himself ? Or rather, was it not Saint Vincent who suggested it ? We are inclined to the latter. Indeed, the more missions were given, the more it became evident that they were almost useless till the clergy were reformed. What good was it to wear themselves out with fatigue in awakening the faith and virtue of the poor country-people, if they did not leave them in the hands of pious and vigilant priests. Even when the people are confided to such pastors, how soon, alas ! do the effects of a mission disappear. What, then, if the faithful aroused by the preaching of the missionaries found no support in their curé, who was negligent, or perhaps worse ? Now, at that time there were too many such priests. The corruption of morals of the fifteenth century, and the Protestant wars of the sixteenth, had by degrees destroyed the schools founded in the Middle Ages for the education of the clergy. Persons no longer took care to test their vocations or to prepare for ordination. To many the priesthood was only a profession, a mere livelihood, which they sought because it seemed easier and more secure than others.

It is true that the Sorbonne and the great universities of France still remained. But above everything else they gave learning, which is a very different thing from virtue. Moreover, they were accessible only to a few, the flower of the clergy, to those who were wealthy enough to live in Paris and the large

cities. In fine, the crowning misfortune was that those trained in the universities considered themselves too learned for the poor country-people, and contemned such a ministry.

Hence, in the country towns and villages, there was a multitude of ignorant, dull, badly educated priests, sometimes even vicious. And in the cities what do we behold?—worldly priests, the younger sons of great families, who were forced into holy orders against their will, contending for elevated positions, aspiring to the episcopate and cardinalate, and often destitute of the virtue necessary for such positions.

No doubt—thanks to the fecundity and divinity of the Church—in the midst of all this there were many holy priests, who sighed over the degradation of their brethren, and many pious bishops who anxiously sought how to raise them from such a sad state; but how that was to be done, nobody knew.

One is saddened in reading the history of that saintly prelate, Mgr. Donnadieu, who, penetrated with zeal for the sanctity of the priesthood, required the ordinands of his diocese to prepare on the eve of their ordination by a general confession. For almost three hours he exhorted them, and in the evening sent to their lodgings to discover and reject the unworthy.

At the same period, 1628, another holy bishop, Mgr. Potier, Bishop of Beauvais, bewailed no less bitterly the wretched state of the clergy. One day he came to visit Saint Vincent, and earnestly besought him to point out a remedy for so great an evil. “My lord,” replied the saint, “we must go straight to the root. It is impossible to reform ecclesiastics hardened in vice, for a bad priest is hardly ever converted. It is among the aspirants to the priesthood, and not among those already ordained, that we must work the reform of the clergy. Only admit those in whom you recognise the requisite learning and all the signs of a true vocation. Even these you should prepare as long as possible, to render them more and more worthy of the functions of the sacred ministry.” His lordship was thoroughly persuaded there was no other means; but how was all this to be accomplished? Day and night he was thinking of it, but feared that all his authority would not prevail against the unwillingness of the ordinands. In the meantime, about the month of July, 1628, the Bishop and the saint set out on a journey together, and began the same conversation. Suddenly the Bishop’s eyes closed, and he appeared to slumber. But soon waking up, “I am not asleep,” he said, “I was thinking seriously of the best way of preparing the young ecclesiastics for holy orders. For the

present I cannot do better than bring them to my own house, and keep them some days, instructing them by means of regular conferences on the things they ought to know and the virtues they ought to practise. "O my lord," interrupted Saint Vincent in a holy transport, and speaking louder than his modesty usually allowed him, "this thought is from God; behold an excellent way of restoring by degrees good order among the clergy." For a long time the conversation was kept up, Saint Vincent continuing to encourage the Bishop, and the Bishop becoming more and more fixed in his resolve. "It is for you, M. Vincent, to assist me to carry it out," said Mgr. Potier on leaving. "I am going to prepare everything, and you can make out in writing the order of the exercises to be followed during this retreat, and the programme of suitable matter to be treated. Then come to Beauvais fifteen or twenty days before the next ordination."—"I will obey, my lord," replied Saint Vincent, "feeling more assured, hearing it now from the mouth of the Bishop, that God demands this service of me, than if it were revealed by an angel."<sup>1</sup>

Fifteen days before the September ordination Saint Vincent arrived at Beauvais, accompanied by M.M. Duchesne and Messier, both doctors of theology. He brought the programme of the exercises, which he had prepared in silence and prayer, and which was perfect and a fit model for all subsequent retreats. The Bishop himself presided at the opening, and the two doctors were to be the preachers. Saint Vincent reserved for himself the conferences, and he explained the Decalogue with such clearness, persuasiveness, and unction, that almost all the ordinands wished to make a general confession to him. M. Duchesne, who rested after his long sermons at the foot of the pulpit from which the saint was preaching, was so touched that, to the great edification of all, he too made a general confession of his whole life to Saint Vincent.

What had so well succeeded at Beauvais, why not try in Paris? The Bishop of Beauvais spoke to Mgr. de Gondî, Archbishop of Paris, and the latter, urged on more by M. Bourdoise, ordered by a letter dated February 21, 1631, that all aspirants to holy orders in his diocese should be obliged to prepare themselves by a retreat of ten days. M. Bourdoise at first thought of accommodating the ordinands at his own place, but the house being too small, he asked Saint Vincent to undertake the work. Our saint hesitated in the beginning, but then consented, and

<sup>1</sup> Maynard, vol. ii. pp. 25-26.

thus the exercises for the ordinands were begun in the Collège des Bons-Enfants. They took place every quarter-tense, ten days before the ordinations. Some years even they were compelled to multiply these retreats so great was the number, not only in Paris, but from the neighbouring provinces, who did not wish to receive orders except they had been prepared by Saint Vincent de Paul. Not less than from eighty to a hundred attended each of these retreats, which took place five or six times a year.

How should the expenses have been defrayed, if the pious ladies whose acquaintance our saint had made had not come to his aid? But their lively faith and that instinct of Christian womanhood taught them that all these works were of the highest and most necessary character. Mme. de Herse undertook the expense for five years; the Marchioness de Meignelais left by her will eighteen thousand livres for the support of the ordinands, not to speak of what she had done during life; and lastly, the Ladies of Charity contributed a large amount. The Queen herself, Anne of Austria, was induced by her ladies-in-waiting to assist at one of the exercises of the retreat. As she withdrew deeply affected, "O madame," said one of the ladies-of-honour, "here is what deserves a foundation!" She promised to think the matter over, and while waiting to be able to do so, she said to Mme. de Herse that on the expiration of her five years she would support the ordinands for another five.

The great attraction of these exercises was Saint Vincent de Paul himself. Yesterday unknown, he now appeared with a reputation for piety, humility, and love of God; and with a sacred eloquence that aroused enthusiasm. People never wearied seeing him say mass every morning. What ardent faith! what recollection! what tender and profound union with the Adorable Victim! What a transformation of his countenance and whole being after holy communion! It equalled a sermon.

On the other hand, with what humility and tenderness he received the ordinands. How he taught his disciples to receive, care, and attend the priests who came to make retreats! "To be employed in forming good priests," said he, "is to be fulfilling the office of Jesus Christ, who during His mortal life undertook to train twelve good priests. For that end He was pleased to dwell many years with them, instructing and forming them for this divine ministry. . . . We are then called by God to labour in this great work, for is there anything in the world so great as the dignity of a priest? Principalities and



kingdoms are not to be compared with it. Kings cannot, like a priest, change bread into the body and blood of our Lord, remit sin, and work all the other blessings that are far above earthly greatness.

"Behold our mission," said he to them. "But who are we that this ministry should be committed to us? We are but miserable creatures, poor labourers and peasants; what fitness is there in such as we for so holy, so exalted and celestial an employment? Yet it is to us that God has entrusted so great a grace as that of contributing to the reform of the clergy. To this end God did not turn to wise doctors, or to the many communities and religious houses, which are full of learning and sanctity, but He has chosen to employ this poor, mean, and pitiable Company, the last and most unworthy of all. What has God found in us to fit us for so great a work? Where are our fine deeds? What striking and illustrious actions have we performed? In what does our capacity consist? There is nothing of the sort. God of His own free will has made choice of a set of poor, miserable beings to labour to repair the breaches in the kingdom of His Son and in the ecclesiastical state. O gentlemen, let us take heed not to lose the grace which God has bestowed upon us in preference to so many learned and holy persons who were so much more worthy of it! For if we let it lie idle through our negligence, God will withdraw it from us, to give it to others, and to punish our unfaithfulness. Alas! which among us shall be the cause of so sad an evil, and will deprive the Church of so great a good? Shall it, perchance, be my miserable self? Let each one of us lay his hand on his conscience and say within himself, 'Is it I who shall be this unhappy one?' Alas! my wickedness would be enough to prevent those celestial favours, and bring down the curse of God on this house. O Lord, who seest me all covered and filled with sins, do not on my account take away Thy grace from this little company! May it continue to serve you in humility and with fidelity, and correspond with you in your design of re-establishing the honour of the Church!

"Fortunately," said he, "we have prayer, and with it we can do all things. The poorest, the most wretched, can by prayer give to the Church good priests. It may be the prayers of a brother who does not even come in contact with the ordinands. At his ordinary work he will raise his heart to God and ask a blessing for the ordinands, and perhaps even when he is not thinking of it, God, seeing the good disposition of his heart, will

grant the blessing he desires. We read in the Psalms: ‘*Desiderium pauperum exaudivit Dominus.*’” Here Saint Vincent suddenly stopped, forgetting the rest, and as usual, humbly turning to those near, said, “Who will tell me the remainder?” One of them said: “*Præparationem cordis eorum audivit auris tua.*”—“Thank you, sir,” replied the saint. This was his ordinary acknowledgment; and delighted with the beauty of the passage, he repeated it several times in a transport of joy and devotion, relishing its sweetness, and then he added aloud: “Wonderful manner of speaking, worthy of the Holy Spirit. *The Lord has granted the desire of the poor, has heard the preparation of their hearts,* showing us that God hears well-disposed souls, even before they pray. This is a great consolation, and ought certainly to encourage us in the service of God, however poor and miserable we feel.”

To prayer he wished to join humility and cordiality. “Let us show the ordinands every mark of respect and deference, not allowing them to serve, but doing so ourselves cordially and humbly. Let us use great vigilance in attending to them and procuring without delay all they want. Be ingenious in providing for their needs, foreseeing even, if possible, their tastes and desires, and anticipating them as much as is reasonable.” On their arrival he wished that there should be always a priest to meet them, see after their luggage and show them their rooms, returning frequently to see if they required anything. He gave the example in everything himself. He delighted to go and meet them, showing them the way through the corridors with a candle in his hand, and carefully pointing out the steps lest they should trip. Sometimes even he was seen cleaning their shoes, when the number of servants or brothers was insufficient.

During the retreat for the ordinands there were two lectures a day—one in the morning, on the most necessary and practical points of the ecclesiastical state, and one in the evening on the virtues requisite for holy orders. Saint Vincent preferred the evening instruction. In what language he extolled the dignity and sanctity of the priesthood! How he painted the scourges bad priests brought upon the world! “Yes,” he would say, “we are the cause of the desolation that afflicts the Church, of that deplorable falling away which she has suffered in so many places—having been almost entirely ruined in Asia, Africa, and even a great part of Europe, such as in Sweden, Denmark, England, Scotland,

Holland, and in a large portion of Germany. And how many heretics do we see in France? . . . Yes, Lord, we have provoked your anger, we have by our sins incurred those calamities. Yes, it is the clerics and those who aspire to the ecclesiastical state, to the sub-diaconate, diaconate, and priesthood, and we who are already ordained that have brought this catastrophe on the Church." And going into detail he went through the grades of the clergy. Some are useless—"they say the breviary, offer the holy sacrifice, and even that very indifferently; while others administer the sacraments by routine. But a great many are buried in vice and disorder." He alluded to priests of an entire province so addicted to intemperance, that an assembly of bishops had to seek a remedy for so ignoble a state of affairs, and could not succeed. "This is not the case," he added by way of consolation, "with all the clergy. No, O Saviour, there are also holy ecclesiastics. Often here in retreat there are *curés* and others who come from a distance to renew their interior spirit. And how many good and holy priests in Paris! There is a large number, and there is not one of those who come here for the conference but is a model. They labour with the greatest fruit. If then there are bad ecclesiastics in the world, and I am the worst and most sinful of all, there are, to make up for them, some who honour God by the holiness of their lives."<sup>1</sup>

He spoke thus of himself to have an opportunity of speaking so to others.

Under these conditions it is not surprising that they came from all parts to the retreats at Saint-Lazare. Through it passed every year five or six hundred young priests, and among them the *élite* of the clergy of France. We may name, among others, M. Olier, who was soon to found Saint-Sulpice;<sup>2</sup> Armand de Rancé, the reformer of la Trappe;<sup>3</sup> Fleury, the historian of the Church, and Bossuet, who was one day to write to Pope Clement XI.: "From our youth we have known that venerable priest, Vincent de Paul, and it was at his pious discourses we imbibed the true principles of Christian piety and of ecclesiastical discipline; remembrance of him, even now is sweet."<sup>4</sup>

How many others might we cite! More than eighty bishops, and innumerable doctors. "O gentlemen!" Saint Vincent used to say to his confrères "it is not by learning that you shall

<sup>1</sup> Maynard, vol. ii. pp. 33-34.

<sup>3</sup> Dubois, vol. i. chap. x.

<sup>2</sup> Faillon, vol. i. p. 62.

<sup>4</sup> Floquet.

do good, nor by the beauty of your language. Our audience is more learned than we are. Many are bachelors and some licentiates in theology, others doctors in law, and there are few who are not versed in philosophy, and to some extent in theology. They have discussions every day, and almost nothing that we can say is new to them, for they have already read or heard it. They themselves confess that it is not our eloquence which appeals to them, but rather the virtue they see practised here."

These first years of the retreats for the ordinands had on the Church of France an influence hidden at first, but at the same time profound. They awakened the sacred fire of the priesthood, brightened its flame, and caused the greatest men not only no longer to blush at the name of priest and ordination, but to glory in them. M. de Gondi (formerly Admiral of the Galleys), M. de la Rochefoucauld, M. Olier, M. Bossuet, fulfilled in the parishes of Paris the humble functions of deacon, sub-deacon, and acolyte, in obedience to the zealous M. Bourdoise, until in their dioceses or parishes they had revived piety and ecclesiastical discipline.

"We must tell you," wrote Saint Vincent in 1633, only five years after the opening of the exercises, "that God in His great goodness has bestowed very special and almost incredible blessings on these retreats for the ordinands; so much so, that those who have made them lead lives worthy of good and perfect ecclesiastics. There are even many distinguished by their birth or talent, who live as regular as we do here, and are even more interior than many among us. They have their order of day, their meditation, mass, examinations of conscience, just like ourselves. They visit the hospitals and prisons, where they catechise, preach, hear confessions, as also in the colleges, with special benediction from God. Among many others there are twelve or fifteen who live in this manner in Paris. They are persons of distinction, and are beginning to be appreciated by the public."<sup>1</sup>

This odour of priestly piety was beginning to bear fruit. Not only did persons no longer blush at the name of priest and at the ceremonies of the sacred ministry, but great lords were to be seen abandoning the most exalted positions to become simple priests. M. de Gondi led the way, M. de Sillery followed,<sup>2</sup> and M. de Ventadour came next. "He was a duke," said Saint Vincent de Paul, "and he became a priest."<sup>3</sup> Many

<sup>1</sup> "Letters," vol. i. p. 77.

<sup>2</sup> *Id* vol. i. p. 87.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* vol. ii. p. 374.

began to follow his example. M. de la Marguerie, formerly President of the province, was only ten days after him. "Among the ordinands we have a member of the Great Council, and a Master of the Exchequer who wish to remain and become priests. M. de Mégrigny, Advocate-General, has retired with M. Brandon to Saint-Maur for the same end."<sup>1</sup>

From these exercises bishops also were beginning to come forth. "The assembly of the ecclesiastics belonging to the Tuesday Conferences seems to me to become better and better. Behold, three bishops have been chosen from among them—M. Godeau of Grasse, M. Fouquet of Bayonne, M. Pavillon of Alet; and M. Barreau has just been nominated by the King coadjutor of Sarlat. God had taken to Himself good M. Seausse, who lived and died like a saint."

Useful, however, and beneficial as were these exercises, they were not enough. The fire now lighted should be kept up. Some means should be devised of affording the young priests an opportunity of rekindling their fervour at its very source. Saint Vincent was thinking so, but being a man who hurried in no undertaking, he was anticipated by another, a fact he by no means regretted.

One day a young priest, one of those who had made the exercises, came to him and asked if he thought it well that those, who were desirous of preserving the grace of ordination, should meet every week in Saint-Lazare, to hear a few words of encouragement and to renew their good resolutions.<sup>2</sup> "O my child!" immediately exclaimed Saint Vincent, "that thought is from heaven. However, we must reflect and pray." He went at once to confer with Mgr. de Gondi, Archbishop of Paris, and he even wrote to the Pope, who blessed and approved of the project.

Who was the young man who initiated this grand work of the Tuesday Conferences? Some think it was M. Olier.<sup>3</sup> What is certain is that, according to all historians, his name heads the list of those who were the first to join, and that nobody under Saint Vincent contributed more to the success of the organisation.

These conferences, the first of which took place on June 25, 1633, and the second, July 9, were to be held every Tuesday. Priests came to them from all parts of Paris. But we must not think that they were merely conferences which persons

<sup>1</sup> "Letters," vol. i. p. 291.

<sup>2</sup> Faillon, vol. i. pp. 68, 78.

<sup>3</sup> Abelly says the contrary, vol. ii. chap. iii.

attended when they wished, in order to hear Saint Vincent de Paul. Our saint, who was gifted with an extraordinary power of organisation, drew up rules himself. Under the direction of the superior-general of the mission, there was a president, with two assistants, and a secretary, who constituted the committee of the conference. To become a member, it was necessary to be nominated by three existing members, and the reception was only after diligent investigation. The director himself introduced the new member and embraced him, which all did in their turn. From that day forward he was subject to the president, who admonished him of his faults, visited or had him visited during sickness and at the hour of death, and all the members attended his funeral. They were all to be united in Jesus Christ by a new bond of love ; to cherish, visit, console, and assist one another to become worthy of Him. A general meeting was to be held at two o'clock every Tuesday in Saint-Lazare. Those who could not attend were to send their apologies to the president. The conference opened with the *Veni Creator*, intoned by the director, after which a subject appointed at the last conference was discussed, each one having an opportunity of speaking. After that the director closed the conference by some remarks which he deemed useful, concluding with a few simple and affecting words. This was the ordinary duty of Saint Vincent, and in this he excelled. He had no pretensions to oratory, but he prayed much before speaking, and meditated deeply on the Sacred Scriptures. His heart was on fire with the love of God and men, and all this produced a simple, warm, persuasive sermon, that enlightened the intellect and moved the will. If a bishop happened to come to the conference, which often occurred, and if Saint Vincent retired in his favour, a thing he always did, it caused general disappointment. Often, even after the bishop, all begged of the saint to speak ; but this deeply embarrassed his humility, and added a new attraction to his words. "We were together," wrote Bossuet, "at those conferences of ecclesiastics that met every week to discuss some pious topic. When we listened to the saint, every one felt that the Apostle's words were being fulfilled : *"If any one speak, let his word be as from God."* M. Tronson, the second superior of Saint-Sulpice, so calm, so grave and recollected, could not restrain his transports of admiration. "Oh !" he would say, "how that man is all for God !" And it was the parting word of all the priests to the missionaries as they went

away after the conference : " Oh ! how happy you are to see and hear every day a man so filled with the love of God ! "

But besides this first and great effect of Saint Vincent's preaching, which was to warm all hearts, and thus prepare the way for the reform of the clergy, there was a second, not indeed so exalted, but which we must not omit. The characteristic of his preaching was its simplicity—" his admirable simplicity," says Bossuet, " and with it his gentleness, love of God and of souls, together with the purity of the sources from which he drew, which were the Sacred Scripture, the example and preaching of Jesus Christ, and a deep knowledge of the instincts and passions of the human heart." This is exactly what was wanting to pulpit oratory in 1633. Instead of finding in Sacred Scripture the proof of what was taught, it was taken from the pagan poets. Père Catton, chaplain and confessor of Henry IV., to prove the certainty of death, cited Homer, Virgil, and Horace, and introduced without taste or selection the discoveries of medicine. Père Senault likewise filled his sermon with Greek and Latin texts to prove the power of the demons. Preachers spoke Latin, and for a long time before women and vergers they had even spoken Greek. In order to preach so badly it was necessary to know a great deal. What they did not seek among the ancient poets they looked for among the schoolmen, and thus were made divisions, and subdivisions, and minor divisions, which made Père Rapin say, that the reading of Saint Thomas, grand and systematic as he is, produced more bad preachers than good ones. And what shall we say of their style, of that pompous and flowery language, which Saint Francis de Sales said that his good taste and judgment made him almost shun, but which is spread throughout the works of his very dear disciple and friend, Mgr. Camus, Bishop of Belley?

It was impossible for so many young priests to meet at those Tuesday Conferences, and speak on all kinds of moral and dogmatic subjects, without introducing some of the bad tastes which reigned everywhere. But Saint Vincent was stern. Simplicity, holy and divine simplicity, should alone be found there. He corrected, and sometimes severely, those who abandoned it. " Imagine," he writes, " I was obliged during one of the ordinations to go on my knees twice and beg a priest not to be wandering into those high flights, and yet he would not give in. Hence God delivered us from this vain mind." <sup>1</sup> " God knows, that as many as three

<sup>1</sup> " Letters," vol. iii. p. 251.

times, during three consecutive days, I went on bended knees before a priest who was then belonging to the little company, but is so no longer, and asked him to preach and speak in all simplicity, without ever being able to win him over. He gave the sermons for the ordinands without producing any fruit, and all his studied thoughts and chosen periods passed like smoke; for, in truth, it is not flowery language that benefits souls, but simplicity and humility, which open and touch hearts by the grace of Jesus Christ." It soon became a rule to speak with simplicity. "The externs who attend the conferences in Saint-Lazare profess to treat the subjects very simply, and when any one becomes ostentatious of his learning or language, immediately they complain to me, so that there may be a remedy applied. The last to do so was M. Tristan, a doctor of theology, who is a member. However, notwithstanding this simple method among us, our Lord grants each one the desire to belong to us."<sup>1</sup> "Would you believe, sir," he wrote on this subject, "that actors, recognising the beauty of simplicity have changed their manner of speaking, and no longer recite their parts in a high tone, as they did formerly, but speak in a medium voice and familiarly to their audience? One of them told me so a few days ago. Now, if in order the better to please the world, actors have changed their method, what a subject of confusion to the preachers of Jesus Christ if their love and zeal for souls do not make them change theirs."<sup>2</sup>

Often bishops came to the conferences and spoke. If they made use of pompous or flowery language, Saint Vincent remained silent in his place, and merely by his deportment the young priests felt how disagreeable it was to him. If, on the contrary, the Bishop spoke simply, the saint was delighted. The Bishop of Sarlat having preached in Saint-Lazare, Saint Vincent went to his room. "My lord," he said, "you have converted me to-day."—"How is that, Sir?"—"Because you spoke so plainly and simply, that it seemed to me very touching, and I could not refrain from thanking God."—"Ah, Sir," replied the Bishop, "I must confess to you with equal candour that I might easily have said something more polished and more elevated, but had I done so, I should have offended God." Still more edified, Saint Vincent did not fail, as usual, to write both the Bishop's sermon and the conversation to his confrères who were absent on the mission. Thus we read in the letter just cited: "Our

<sup>1</sup> "Letters," vol. i. p. 397.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* vol. i. p. 228.



ordinands, thanks be to God, have left well satisfied, after giving us great edification. His lordship the Bishop of Sarlat gave them the evening instruction exceedingly well, and, as we have seen lately, the reason of his success is found in his humility in following word for word the programme of these instructions as drawn up by the first to give them. He neither introduced far-fetched thoughts nor novel expressions, as others have done before, who utterly failed from not keeping to the simple method and to the point.”<sup>1</sup>

No one was a greater lover of that simplicity, or profited more by such advice, than Bossuet. “The sublime simplicity of Saint Vincent,” said M. Floquet, “profoundly appealed to Bossuet, himself so simple. To the end of his life, speaking frequently of Saint Vincent, of his prodigious charity, and of the eminent qualities which he admired in him, he particularly dwelt on his simplicity, which attracted him most. ‘*His simplicity, his admirable simplicity,*’ he used to say with evident emotion; and we have it from those who lived with him that the great orator never tired speaking of this characteristic virtue of the saint.”<sup>2</sup> He remembered it all his life, and made it a rule in preaching.

Conferences where the most distinguished clergy assembled, and the greatest bishops used to speak, could not but stir all Paris. The report reached Richelieu, who, half pious and half politic, wished nothing to go on without his knowledge, and accordingly sent for Saint Vincent and got an account of the nature, object, and progress of his conferences. Delighted with what he heard, he exhorted him to persevere in all his good works, promising his support, and inviting him to visit him from time to time. Towards the end of the interview Richelieu asked to see the list of members, with a mark over those that the saint judged suitable for the mitre. He himself wrote down their names for presentation to the King, and then dismissed the saint. “I already had a great opinion of M. Vincent,” said Richelieu shortly afterwards to the Duchess d’Aiguillon, “but I look upon him as altogether another man since my last interview with him.”<sup>3</sup> The Cardinal took the saint’s advice and promoted many of Saint Vincent’s disciples to the episcopate.

What Richelieu had begun Louis XIII., on the Cardinal’s death, wished to continue. Often he secretly sent to our saint to have a list forwarded of the priests whom he deemed worthy

<sup>1</sup> Maynard, vol. ii, p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> Floquet, vol. i. p. 167.

<sup>3</sup> Maynard, vol. ii. p. 71.

of being made bishops. Saint Vincent willingly complied with the request, but on one condition, namely, that the King and ministers promised absolute secrecy. "Otherwise," said he, "the Tuesday Conferences, instead of forming saints, would turn out hypocrites and place-hunters."

Thus was begun the reform of the clergy, thus were laid the first stones of the great Church of France. I say the first, for however important the retreats for the ordinands and the Tuesday Conferences were, they were not enough. They merely influenced the clergy of Paris and its environs, and even only the *elite* of them, for the conferences were hardly known in the provinces. For the reform of the clergy of France something deeper and wider, something that touched and renewed every diocese, was wanting. What was wanting was what the Council of Trent had foreseen, what Saint Charles had endeavoured to supply but imperfectly, what Saint Francis de Sales had not even dared to attempt, but what has since become the greatness, the power, the fecundity of the Church of France—ecclesiastical seminaries.

## CHAPTER III.

### ECCLESIASTICAL SEMINARIES

1635-1642.

AMONG the disciplinary decrees of the Council of Trent there is perhaps not one more important, nor one which has exercised a more salutary influence on the Church, and especially on the Church of France, than the decree relating to the erection of ecclesiastical seminaries. When signing it, the Fathers rejoiced, and declared that they were adequately repaid for all their labours if even the Council had done nothing else. If they spoke thus, what shall we say who have seen their decree realised after innumerable obstacles, and produce in France a clergy every day more regular and devoted?

In the first place let us listen to the words of the holy Council of Trent: "Whereas young people, unless well brought up, are prone to follow the voluptuousness of the world, and unless from their youth they have been trained in piety and religion before habits of vice have taken possession of the whole man, they never will perfectly, and without the greatest, and well-nigh special help of God, persevere in ecclesiastical discipline; the holy Council ordains that all cathedral, metropolitan, and other churches greater than these, shall be bound, each according to its means and the extent of the diocese, to support, to rear in piety, and to train in ecclesiastical discipline, a certain number of youths of their city, diocese, or province, in a college to be chosen by the Bishop for this purpose near the said churches, or in some other suitable place.

"In this college let those be received who, having been born in lawful wedlock, have at least attained their twelfth year, are able to read and write passably, and whose naturally good and pious disposition gives token that they will always continue in the service of the Church. It is the wish of the Council that the children of the poor should be preferred, though not excluding the rich, provided they defray their own expenses and manifest a desire and love for the service of God and His Church.

"The Bishop having divided these students into as many classes as he thinks fit, according to their number, age, and

progress, shall apply some of them in the service of the Church when he thinks proper, and retain the others in the college, always replacing those whom he called out, so that the college may be a perpetual seminary for the service of God.

“And that they may the more easily be trained in ecclesiastical discipline, they shall wear the clerical dress and tonsure from the time of their entrance. They shall learn grammar, chant, the ecclesiastical calendar, and all the other liberal arts ; they shall be instructed in Sacred Scripture, ecclesiastical books, homilies of the saints, the administration of the sacraments, especially what is calculated to enable them to hear confessions—in fine, all the ceremonies and usages of the Church. The Bishop shall see that they attend holy mass daily, confess at least once a month, receive holy communion with the advice of their confessor, and on festivals serve in the cathedral or local churches.”

The holy Council then proceeds to lay down the financial conditions of these new institutions. The resources were to be levied on the revenues of the bishoprics, chapters, abbeys, priories, and in general on all benefices. The more to accentuate the sovereign importance it attaches to these necessary institutions, the Council threatens with severe penalties those archbishops and bishops who neglect to establish them.

At first sight the erection of these seminaries seemed easy. To take the youth of good families, to guard them from the dangers of the world, to train them in piety, always so attractive to the young, to prepare them by degrees for the priesthood, to show them its beauty, and to impress them with the thought of its greatness, so as to present them for ordination burning with the love of God and souls, what could be easier ? But besides the human passions which are to be found even in the hearts of the smallest children ; besides that propensity to evil, to spiritual sloth, to seeking ease, to ambition for honours and dignities, which quenches the most ardent zeal and dims the highest ideal, we must also take account of the institutions that had been but were no more, of those colleges, academies, and universities whose débris was tripping the reformers at every step, binding them to the past, and hindering them in realising the ideal of the Council of Trent.

It was because of that everything failed. Gregory XIII., desiring to show the example, founded the Roman College, but it was only an academy giving a course of lectures and conferences to externs. Saint Charles established at Milan two or

three seminaries, and seemed to have better understood the intention of the Council of Trent, for from him M. Olier confesses to have borrowed the plan of his seminary. But notwithstanding Saint Charles' virtue, the seminaries did not extend beyond Milan or that province. Another holy bishop, Bartholomew de Martyribus, established a seminary in the episcopal city of Braga, in Portugal, but though renowned for his sanctity, he did not induce any other bishop to follow his example. Saint Francis de Sales seems not even to have tried the work. One day M. Bourdoise expressed his astonishment that he had not devoted his talents to training ecclesiastics. "I acknowledge," said the holy Bishop, "and am thoroughly convinced, that there is nothing more necessary in the Church, but having laboured for seventeen years to bring up merely three priests to assist me to reform the clergy of my diocese, I was only able to produce one and a half."

In France the work was still less advanced, inasmuch as many had tried and failed, so that even the best inclined thought the scheme impossible. Every provincial council returned to the subject and insisted upon it. The Council of Rouen in 1581, of Bordeaux in 1582, of Rheims and Tours in 1583, of Bourges in 1584, of Aix in 1585, of Toulouse in 1586, and lastly, in 1629, the assembly of the French clergy, renewed all these decrees, and ordered the immediate erection of at least four national seminaries. But the bishops who signed this resolution, returned to their dioceses not knowing how to put it in practice, and reluctantly abandoned a work which they deemed necessary but almost impossible.

What increased their discouragement was, that saintly bishops and others who had immense resources at their disposal had tried the work, but failed. Cardinal de Joyeuse, Archbishop of Rouen; Cardinal de Sourdis, Archbishop of Bordeaux; the Cardinal de Lorraine, Archbishop of Rheims, all saw their seminaries after ten or twelve years dwindle away, or if they subsisted at all, they had degenerated into mere colleges from which no priests came forth. Even Richelieu, accustomed to be obeyed, had not succeeded here.

Now it was said, if such men have failed, how can we hope to succeed? As a matter of fact, the work was abandoned by all parties as impossible.

Yet, in spite of those great obstacles, the hour fixed by Divine Providence for the erection of ecclesiastical seminaries was approaching. There were then in France three or four holy priests

diligently studying this difficult problem and preparing themselves to confront it. One was designing this thing, another adding that, one planning, another destined to carry out the plan, and all about to realise the beautiful ideal of the Council of Trent. These three or four holy priests were : M. de Bérulle, of the Rue Saint-Jacques ; M. Bourdoise, at the seminary of Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet ; M. Vincent, at the Collège des Bons-Enfants ; and M. Olier, at Vaugirard—the four in the closest intimacy, and inflamed with zeal for the reform of the clergy.

M. de Bérulle was the oldest and the most eminent in the eyes of the world. He was a cardinal, but, as Bossuet said, the purple added nothing to his merit. Having established the Carmelites in Paris and throughout France, he was just then founding the Oratory, in which we must also admire : Père de Condren (of whom we shall speak later on), Père de Bourgoing (whose funeral oration Bossuet delivered), and soon afterwards Père le Jeune, Père Malebranche, Père Thomassin and Père Massillon. M. de Bérulle's object was to devote his entire Congregation to the education of the clergy and the direction of seminaries. That nothing might interfere with this plan, he asked the Pope, when having the rules approved, to strictly forbid his priests to be employed in colleges, in order that they might reserve themselves exclusively for seminaries. It is a strange fact, and one which would seem to show that the finger of God was directing more than people thought, the least details in the growth of these religious orders—this prohibition was the only point that was omitted by the Pope in his Bull of Approbation. Hence the Pope not having forbidden it, and the tendency of the time urging them on, the Oratorians took up colleges, and by degrees abandoned the work of the seminaries. Pious historians think that it was by a special providence of God that this prohibition was omitted in the Pope's Bull ; for the Oratory gradually having fallen into Jansenism, what should have become of the French clergy, if it had almost the entire education of the ecclesiastics ? When dying, in 1629, Cardinal de Bérulle handed over the government of his Congregation to Père de Condren, a man of exceptional virtue, of supernatural wisdom, and destined to have a sovereign influence on the creation of ecclesiastical seminaries.

The second of these holy men working for the reform of the clergy was M. Bourdoise. He was a simple priest without fame or pretensions, a curé of one of the poorest parishes, but with a

heart of an Elias and a John the Baptist. He wept over the desecration of the sanctuary, and endowed with a strong mind and originality of expression, he used his gifts to stigmatise the disorders among the clergy. Neither priest nor bishop nor cardinal could escape his sarcasm; nothing stopped him, so great was the holy emotion which urged him to speak. Always wearing the soutane and tonsure, he stigmatised those priests who were dressed as laics and sometimes as military men. He stopped in the streets, went to the houses of the priests, most distinguished by their virtue, birth, and fortune, the Vincents, the Oliers, the Bretonvilliers, the Gondis, and the Bossuets, making them carry the censers and torches, or read the epistle, in order to shame the priests who blushed at those humble but holy functions. If he had devoted himself to founding seminaries, what should he not have done? But he thought, like so many others, that seminaries were impossible. Instead of training the rising generation, he only laboured to sanctify those already ordained. He formed them into communities; taught them to meditate, to live in common, obey the first sound of the bell, and to scrupulously carry out the smallest ceremonies of the Church. With such communities he filled France. He established them in Paris, and thus in a manner prepared the way for seminaries, for he showed how students might be brought to live in common, since it had been successfully tried with priests. Still those communities did not last, and one who had belonged to them for ten years gives the reason: "Although we had little solid instruction in these communities," said he, "nevertheless God kept me there for ten years. Many others as young as myself joined, but not one persevered, and I cannot say why, seeing that there were no disorders in them"<sup>1</sup> Men cannot be kept together with no other aim than to practise ceremonies.

The third person trying to solve this deep problem of the seminaries was Saint Vincent. At first he did not intend to do so. The constitutions which he had sent to the Pope for approbation, made no mention of ecclesiastical seminaries, and not even did the Bull itself dated 1632. Later on, when the opinion was spreading that the clergy would never be reformed except by seminaries, and people were urging him to devote himself to them, the saint still replied that his work was to give missions, that the Pope had approved of his Congregation for that end, and that only an angel from heaven could

<sup>1</sup> Saint-Beuve, vol. i., p. 425.

persuade him to abandon a work which had so wonderfully succeeded, for another which up to the present had failed.

At length, urged by most holy bishops, he undertook the work, and in 1635 made his first attempt. He received into the Collège des Bons-Enfants twelve or fourteen young students to prepare them for the priesthood. Whether it was that they were too young, or that their directors were incapable, the endeavour did not succeed and had to be given up. Six years afterwards, in 1641, at the earnest solicitation of the pious Mgr. Juste Guérin, Bishop of Annecy, he made a second attempt in the episcopal city, this time receiving only those who had read their humanity. They were approaching the end of their studies, when again, without any apparent reason, the work failed, and the seminary was closed, not to be reopened till 1663. It was the same with the seminaries of Alet and Saintes. At last, in 1642, Saint Vincent felt that the real cause of so many successive failures was to be found in the mixing of the seminarists proper with the young students, under a code of discipline not applicable to both. He determined then to separate them. He retained the seminarists in the Collège des Bons-Enfants, and placed the students in a house that was purchased at the end of the grounds, called the Seminary of Saint Charles. By this master-stroke he founded once for all what has never since been abandoned—large and small seminaries.

While Saint Vincent was thus slowly and patiently realising the decree for the institution of seminaries, there was near him a priest, still young, whom God was guiding to the same end in a most rapid and marvellous manner. Few men have been more privileged than M. Olier. Saint Francis de Sales had blessed his infancy, Saint Vincent de Paul had trained and prepared him for holy orders, and Père de Condren had directed his maturer years and revealed to him his true vocation. Having gone through the exercises for the ordinands, and having been one of the first two, if not absolutely the first, to contribute to establish the Tuesday Conferences, he for many years confessed to Saint Vincent, whom he tenderly loved. But suddenly between those two saintly friends a thin, delicate cloud arose that embarrassed both. Saint Vincent was anxious that M. Olier should become a bishop, to which the latter felt a decided repugnance. To evade obedience to his holy director, M. Olier set out for Auvergne



where he gave missions on the lands attached to his Abbey of Pébrac. On the way he met a holy religious, since declared venerable by Pius VII., Mother Agnes de Langeac, and told her of his anxieties. She, enlightened by God, as has since been proved, advised him to consult Père de Condren. This was M. de Bérulle's successor in the Oratory, a man of extraordinary virtue and wisdom. He was neither an administrator nor a writer nor an orator, but endowed with a gift, to which he sacrificed everything, of inflaming by his conversation and burning zeal both priests and laics who came in contact with him. Cardinal de Bérulle, his superior, and a man of great interior enlightenment, often kissed the ground he trod. Saint Vincent entertained for him no less esteem. "The saint often spoke of him in language which seemed incredible," said M. Olier, "and I remember his saying to me, 'No man is to be found like him,' and a number of similar expressions. When he heard of his death, throwing himself on his knees and striking his breast, he accused himself, with tears in his eyes, of not having honoured the man as much as he deserved." St. Chantal spoke equally high of him. "If God," she said, "has given our holy founder to the Church to instruct men, it seems to me He has made Père de Condren capable of instructing angels." In fine, M. Olier pays him this magnificent tribute: "We saw only the covering and appearance, for within he was totally another being, living the interior of Jesus Christ in his hidden life, so that it was more Jesus Christ living in him than Père de Condren living in himself. He was like the Host on our altars: we see the accidents and appearance of bread, but in reality it is Jesus Christ. So it was with this great servant of our Lord."<sup>1</sup>

M. Olier came then to consult Père de Condren, who, having heard him, said, "You must not think of becoming a bishop. God designs you for something not less useful to the Church."<sup>2</sup> At the time he seemed to be gathering into the ranks of the clergy some eminent men whom he wished to make use of for some great purpose. Thus he prevented from being elevated to the episcopacy M. du Ferrier, M. de Coulet, and many others. When Cardinal Richelieu was asking for some who were worthy of the episcopate, after mentioning a number, Père de Condren said, "There are still more, but God is reserving them for an all-important work."<sup>3</sup>

Père de Condren was now about to die; he had not more than eight days to live, and as yet had not revealed to any one

<sup>1</sup> Faillon, *Vie de M. Olier*, vol. i. p. 136.    <sup>2</sup> *Id.* p. 130.    <sup>3</sup> *Id.* p. 129.

“that great design, that all-important work,” for which he had been reserving such eminent priests. At last, on December 30, 1640, as there was no longer any doubt of his approaching death, having received M. du Ferrier, a friend of M. Olier, he determined to open his mind to him. His words are as solemn as those of a last will and testament, and are of interest to the entire Church. He opened the question with M. du Ferrier ; but not being free then, and wishing to have a longer conversation on so important a subject, he asked him to return the next day.

“The following day, after mass,” writes M. du Ferrier, “I went at eight o’clock to Père de Condren, and found with him M. de Renty, who retired on my arrival. He then began ; and having shown that the fruit of missions, though excellent, would be lost if it were not preserved by good ecclesiastics, he said he had come to the conclusion that it was necessary to labour in forming good priests. He would leave out of the question those already advanced in years and ordained without preparation, for it hardly ever happens that a bad priest is converted. ‘This ought to convince us,’ he added, ‘of the necessity of bringing up the young students in the ecclesiastical spirit, which can never be accomplished except by seminaries, as the Council of Trent has pointed out.’ On hearing this, I reminded him of the difficulties which people thought insuperable, and that it was useless to try to establish seminaries when, after more than sixty years, those of Toulouse, Bordeaux, and Rouen had failed, notwithstanding the great care bestowed upon them by Cardinals de Joyeuse and de Sourdis. He showed me that people were deceived, and that there was nothing easier, provided those admitted were of a certain age, and were such that their judgment, already developed, would enable them to decide after some trial whether they had a true vocation. He dwelt at great length on this subject, and encouraged me to rely on the assistance which God would undoubtedly give to the undertaking. He added even that there was no time to be lost, for the wicked spirit would not fail to create dissensions and troubles to prevent this good work of forming ecclesiastics. We were then in a time of great tranquillity, and there was then no question of those opinions which have since caused such division and damage in the Church. He warned us, in fine, always to submit to the Pope, avoiding controversy and disputes, according to the advice of Saint Paul.

“It struck ten o’clock, and Brother Martin, his assistant, came to remind him that it was the time to say mass, but

he was told to wait a while. At eleven the brother returned and urged him again to prepare. Then to my surprise, Père de Condren, that prudent and most circumspect man, made this reply, 'My brother, if you knew at what I am engaged you would not hurry me, for I am doing far more than what you want me to do.' Having continued the conversation till near twelve, he then said, 'Brother Martin will get impatient, let us defer the rest till to-morrow morning.' He went then to say mass, and I left, never again to see him alive. Returning the next day, I found that he was very bad with inflammation of the lungs, and the doctors had forbidden him to speak, so that I did not see him."

He died two days afterwards a death of extraordinary sanctity, which astounded and edified his disciples even more than his beautiful life. M. Olier and his friends assisted at the obsequies, and, faithful to the holy priest's instructions, began the seminary of Saint-Sulpice.

Was there any difference between the seminaries founded by Saint Vincent de Paul and those by M. Olier? None. Both men had similar views, and all their plans were blended gradually into one.

A seminary is a conservatory (*seminarium*), a place where precious seedlings and plants still too tender to be exposed to the air, are sheltered from the north winds. Thus it was our Lord acted when He Himself trained in solitude and silence His twelve Apostles before sending them out to convert the world. How far more necessary was such a separation from the world for those young students, especially when it was a question of preparing them for so exalted a mission. Time and quiet were necessary for a student to examine his mind and to discover if it should recoil before the great sacrifices that the priesthood demands. Nor were time and recollection less necessary to the directors to discover those who had true vocations, and to see if each student had sufficient virtue, courage, judgment, and capacity to have souls entrusted to him. And again, when a vocation was clear, time, vigilance, and constant efforts were required to solidly establish in the student's character those virtues necessary to overcome all the dangers to which the priest is exposed. Thus it was from the first ages, thus were the clerics reared in the cloisters of Saint Benedict, and in the episcopal and cathedral schools of the Middle Ages. The greatest bishops and the most eminent popes were those whose youth was passed in solitude and silence, far away from

the world. Then came the universities, taking the ecclesiastics away, and exposing them to public life. But what was the gain? Were they not formed worldly and dissipated? It was therefore evident that they must return to the old traditions and reopen to the young ecclesiastics houses of silence and retreat, where they might be trained in virtue and ecclesiastical learning.

Virtue and learning are the two great requisites in a priest. Without learning he is useless, without virtue he is dangerous. It was of the priest's learning our Lord said, "*You are the light of the world.*" It was of his virtue He said, "*You are the salt of the earth.*" Learning is purified, refined, made humble and fruitful by virtue, and virtue elevated and ennobled by learning. A virtuous priest—oh, how venerable! A learned priest—oh, how beautiful! But a virtuous and a learned priest, whose countenance reveals learning and whose heart is inflamed with virtue, before such a priest we bow in reverence as before the truest image of God on earth!

All the exercises of a seminary tend to form such a priest, for in it learning and piety are combined with the greatest discretion. Prayer, holy mass, confession and frequent communion, spiritual reading, the rosary, and the particular examen make students holy priests; while the study of the Sacred Scriptures, of dogmatic and moral theology, of the liturgy and canon law, make them learned. They pass from the one to the other without fatigue, and with moderate attention they leave the seminary sufficiently grounded in virtue and learning to enable them, without danger to themselves, to come in contact with those whom God should confide to their care.

Science taught in the seminaries is different from that taught in the universities. No doubt sacred science is one, but like other sciences it is divided into lower and higher branches. It was the latter that was taught in the universities, producing doctors and men capable of refuting the most formidable enemies of the Church. Altogether different is the aim of a seminary, for here it is not so much doctors as pastors that are to be formed. What is necessary is a middle course, a compendious and exact knowledge which clearly shows the principles and embraces the necessary teaching. The more gifted may go higher, but even for them this middle course is necessary. It lays a solid and sure foundation, the absence of which even the best will feel.

It is this very point that Saint Vincent explains with his usual common-sense and clearness. The question was raised whether

the professors in the seminaries should use an author and content themselves with explaining it, or whether it would be better for them to write themselves or give dictates. Many preferred the dictates, which afforded the professor an opportunity of exhibiting his talent. Saint Vincent held the contrary. "With an approved author," said he, "the teaching will be surer, the bishops more confident, the little company less exposed to envy and censure, professors more easily obtained, their work less severe, and lastly, the students better formed and instructed." It was objected that professors who did not write would be thought less of and tempted to leave the seminary. That would be true, perhaps, if there were no other attractions in the seminary but science, and if all the students were savants; but piety, chant, ceremonies, catechising and preaching were also to be taught.

Again, it was urged against his view that professors would become more learned. That may be, he said, but they would do nothing else but study, compose, and dictate, and that being the case, what should become of piety, chant, ceremonies, catechising, and preaching? Who, moreover, would look after discipline? Lastly, the example of the Jesuits and of the universities was adduced. "But that is another matter," replied Saint Vincent; "they make public profession of teaching the sciences, and have to maintain their reputation. On the other hand, in a seminary there is more need of piety and average knowledge, with an acquaintance with ceremonies, chant, preaching, and catechising, than there is of extensive learning. I assure you if we enter on our duties in this spirit you will soon have it said in the little company that we ought to lecture publicly and have more deeply learned professors in the seminaries. Under these circumstances, alas! what should become of the poor country-people, and in what spirit should we compete with those other learned bodies? Where should be the humility in which God founded, reared, and developed this little company up to the present?"

But if in the seminaries so much care is to be taken in giving the students that "respectable mediocrity" which is necessary for each, and sufficient for all, what is to be said of the manner in which they are to be formed in virtue? We may place a limit to learning, but none to virtue. The lowest may become the highest. If it were only to direct, to purify, to save a village of three hundred souls, we are never sufficiently holy. Moreover, everywhere temptations are to be met. Vice needs not necessarily to be clothed in silk; and always to conquer and preserve

his soul unsullied, the priest must be of a virtue almost divine. Everywhere, too, in remote districts, holy souls are to be found, virgins consecrated to God who stand in need of a director, whose piety is equal to his learning, and who will loosen their wings instead of clipping them. Under these circumstances, we may justly say that seminaries are an incomparable blessing. They have made our modern clergy the holiest and the purest ever witnessed.

In this virtue and learning the predominating feature is the love of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Eternal Priest, and a holy enthusiasm for their divine vocation. To be a priest, to continue and extend on earth the mission of Jesus Christ, to have hands that, raised over the sinner, absolved him from his sin, lips which uttered words that pierced the clouds and brought Jesus Christ among us, and a heart whence incessantly flowed consolation, hope, and pardon—oh, how soul-stirring are these thoughts! It is in preparation for this holy state that for three or four years meditations, holy communions, spiritual lectures, retreats, and all the exercises in the seminary are made. One indeed should have a heart of steel not to be affected and stimulated.

How admirable is the Church in the way she ordains her ministers. Not all at once, but slowly ascending by degrees, as if up those white marble steps leading to the Temple. To-day the ecclesiastical habit and tonsure mark the renunciation of all worldly hopes, and the acceptance of God for the sole portion and eternal inheritance. To-morrow, minor orders bestow upon the ordinands the rights and privileges of the first grade, so looked down upon in the seventeenth century before the institution of seminaries, but so much esteemed since. In some parts, at ordinations, venerable priests, canons, and curés of important parishes might be seen humbly carrying torches, swinging the censers and serving mass. O holy and admirable M. Bourdoise, what would you say if you witnessed so grand a spectacle?

Next is conferred the sub-diaconate, where, at the threshold of the sanctuary, thrilling with love, the ordinand vows to be for ever Jesus Christ's and His alone. Then the diaconate, when trembling with emotion, he begins to take part in the divine sacrifice, and to touch the sacred vessel containing the blood of Jesus Christ. Lastly, the priesthood, when full of joy, amazement, and rapturous delight, it is said, "*Consummatum est*,"—it is consummated. The Creator can do no more for His creature.

No, everything is not conferred all at once. Between each step a preparation is made of three months, six months, or a year. This chalice of love is taken drop by drop, and the draught increasing each time, produces in the soul a holy intoxication. After thirty or forty years of trials and disappointments in the ministry, only five minutes' reflection, fills the heart again with this ever-enduring fervour. The seminaries then are a noble work, and it is not surprising that God should have multiplied saintly founders of them: M. de Bérulle, Père de Gondî, Saint Vincent de Paul, M. Olier, and M. Bourdoise, among whom our heart forbids us to make a distinction.

But it was not sufficient to found seminaries. It was necessary to have priests to carry them on—priests who were willing to renounce everything, to devote themselves entirely to this laborious and hidden work—men of the most eminent virtue and talent, the very sap of the priesthood, but who should be contented to bury themselves in impenetrable obscurity, like those roots that bear and vivify great trees without themselves being seen.

We might expect that such a work should be given to religious, men completely separated from the world, and living in the constant practice of mortification and detachment. Destined, as they are, to be the models of the clergy, to be their directors and fathers, would not the students more readily place confidence in the austere and mortified religious? But there must have been some good reason, as all the founders of seminaries—M. de Bérulle, M. Olier, Saint Vincent de Paul, Père de Condren, and M. Bourdoise—were unanimous in saying that the staff of a seminary should belong to and be taken from the secular clergy. Saint Vincent when urged to have his disciples religious with solemn vows, absolutely refused. M. Olier wished his followers to be simply called priests of the seminary, not adopting the title Father, and having as a law: "*Nec aliter vivit nisi vita cleri.*" Père de Condren also was very determined on this point. There were to be no solemn vows in these societies, but on that account obedience was all the more stringent. To them all we may apply those eloquent words of Bossuet, "They had no other spirit than the spirit of the Church, no other rules than her canons, no other superiors than her bishops, no other property than her charity, no other solemn vows than those of baptism and priesthood."<sup>1</sup>

We must not discuss here whether Saint Vincent de Paul or

<sup>1</sup> Bossuet, vol. xii. p. 646.



M. Olier was the founder of seminaries. We should be discussing merely a trifle, for it was only a matter of six months more on one side or six months less on the other, and the founders themselves do not appear quite agreed on the point.<sup>1</sup> "After the example of the little Society de Vaugirard, the Oratory and the Congregation of the Mission have laboured fervently in the work of seminaries." From this we see M. Olier believed the Sulpicians to be the first. "We are consoled to see that our little work has seemed so good and useful, that others are induced to labour like us, but with more blessings, not only at the missions, but even in seminaries, which are widely extending in France." Here Saint Vincent thinks the contrary. The work was, in fact, the offspring of the time, the result of the great wave that was then passing over France, stirring every heart and causing each to labour earnestly, without looking around to see what others were doing.

Between them there was no envy, no jealousy. In what terms did Saint Vincent speak of M. Olier! With what affection he visited him in his last illness, and what respect and veneration did he show at his death! On the other hand, M. Olier always spoke of M. Vincent as his father, often saying to the ecclesiastics of his seminary: "M. Vincent is our father," and he always manifested great esteem for his signal virtues.

It has been said that the kiss of Saint Dominic and Saint Francis of Assisium has been transmitted from generation to generation on the lips of their posterity. So it is with the posterity of Saint Vincent and M. Olier. Each year, on the feast of Saint Vincent, the children of M. Olier may be seen prostrate before his tomb in the Rue de Sèvres. And if in the inscrutable designs of Providence that day should come which we long for, the day of the canonisation of M. Olier, then too shall be seen kneeling before his tomb the children of Saint Vincent de Paul. The same love, the same gratitude would unite the families of those two great saints, who together have created, or rather revived, the Church of France, by the inestimable blessing of ecclesiastical seminaries.

<sup>1</sup> Saint Vincent founded the Seminary for his Congregation in 1637, one in Annecy in 1641, and the Collège des Bon-Enfants in 1642. Saint Sulpice was founded in 1642.



## CHAPTER IV.

SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL OPPOSES THE FALSE REFORM OF THE  
CHURCH ATTEMPTED BY JANSENISM—DEATH OF SAINT  
CHANTAL

1642. .

WHILE the holy priests of whom we have been speaking, Saint Vincent de Paul, Cardinal de Bérulle, Père de Condren, M. Olier, and M. Bourdoise, without closing their eyes to the evils afflicting the Church, were trying to remedy them (having founded for this end, one the Congregation of the Mission, another the Oratory, and a third the Community of Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet), and were uniting in these institutions to revive the ecclesiastical state, there were at the same time other great men, learned doctors, who also saw those evils and deplored them not less keenly; but destitute of lively faith in the indefectibility of the Church, they almost despaired of her cure, and were seeking outside her means of regeneration.

The two principal persons of this second class were: Cornelius Jansenius, and Vergier de Hauranne, Abbé of Saint-Cyran. The first was born in 1585 near Leerdham, in Flanders; the second at Bayonne in 1581. Thus they were almost the same age. They met in Paris in 1605, and became the greatest friends while attending lectures in the Sorbonne, whither they had come to complete their theological studies. They were as alike in disposition as in age. Both were talented, devoted to study, and having a special taste for learning, both were to gratify it to the full. Again, both were piously inclined, jealous of the honour of the Church, but of a melancholy disposition, looking at the dark side of everything, and criticising men and things with excessive severity. They were inclined, moreover, to novelties. Jansenius was more of a theologian and capable of searching into the depths of dogma; while Saint Cyran was more of a moralist, drawn to solve practical cases and to the direction of souls. The one was a dreamer, the other ever restless and intriguing; the Fleming grave, the Frenchman sprightly; but both imperious and deluding souls by their austerity. Under pretext of reforming the Church

they dealt her a blow that would have proved fatal, had she not been divine. It was only after their death that the depth of the wound was seen. When they had completed their studies and prepared their theses for the doctorate, Jansenius might have obtained his in Paris, but like an affectionate son he preferred Louvain. Saint Cyran, however, was obliged to defer his degree, in consequence of the unforeseen rivalry between the Sorbonne and the monastery of the Grands-Augustins. It was at this period that the two friends took an important resolution. Discontented with the course at the Sorbonne, deeming it too superficial and not sufficiently practical, they determined to retire to a country place and devote themselves to the study of primitive Christianity. At this very time Saint Cyran's father died, and his mother recalled him home. At Champré they had a beautiful and extensive place along the coast, where the two friends had ample time, books and leisure to devote themselves entirely to study. They did so with a sort of passion. Jansenius, who was the more delicate, passed his days and almost nights over Saint Augustine, a study he never relinquished, having read, pen in hand, the eleven folio volumes as many as forty-two times. Saint Cyran's mother became frightened, and told her son that Jansenius would kill himself from study, for neither of them took much sleep. Unfortunately, while they were thus engaged at the difficult study of the Fathers, the two friends were not only alone, without a guide, but their minds were filled with confused ideas. Jansenius had imbibed at Louvain the false doctrine of Baius concerning grace and free-will. Saint Cyran, on his side, had not entirely escaped the semi-Calvinistic influences that were afloat at the Sorbonne, and allowed himself to be persuaded that the Church, especially in her practices, had somewhat lost her primitive purity, and could alone be restored to the beauty which Jesus Christ had given her by going back to the discipline of the first centuries. It was towards those two points, that the young priests were to direct their researches. As yet there was nothing definite in their minds. But they thought that the Church had become too human, grace was no longer sufficiently exalted, and the sacred mysteries not sufficiently respected ; that there was a tinge of Pelagianism or almost Arianism abroad ; that people thought too little of God, and too much of man, of his liberty, of his power and his rights ; that they did not realise the gravity of penance, the mysterious and thrilling grandeur of communion and

the fewness of the elect. The two friends, therefore, thought that it was necessary to examine all this again in the Fathers, in order to find out the lost doctrine on grace and the sacraments.

In this great undertaking they divided the work. Jansenius, more given to theology, took up the question of grace, the correct idea of which, as he believed, was lost. He dived into the writings of Saint Augustine to find it, and after a hidden and studious life, left a work in three volumes, into which he had condensed what he believed to be the true doctrine of Saint Augustine, and consequently of the Church, on grace. Saint Cyran, on the other hand, devoted himself to the study of ecclesiastical discipline in the first three or four centuries, concerning penances, confession and holy communion, and likewise wrote several books which were destined to deeply afflict the Church. Although they worked in a certain sense independently, yet, to show their union and mark their sonship of Saint Augustine, because that great man was named *Aurelius Augustinus*, Saint Cyran called his work *Aurelius*, and Jansenius his *Augustinus*.

They were only beginning these studies when events separated them. Jansenius set out for Louvain, and having received his doctorate, was placed at the head of a large college. Ultimately he was made Bishop of Ypres, where he died young, leaving his *Augustinus* unpublished, but with a dedicatory letter in which he submits himself entirely to the authority of the Pope. On his side, Saint Cyran left Bayonne and came to Poitiers, where the Bishop, Mgr. de la Rocheposay, made him Canon and afterwards Abbé of Saint-Cyran, by which name he has since become so celebrated.

Though separated at the very outset, the two friends remained warmly attached. They constantly wrote and communicated to each other the results of their labours, their researches and designs for restoring to the Church her true doctrine and discipline, which, they said, had been neglected or misunderstood. Some fragments of this correspondence show the unsettled state of mind into which Jansenius fell from his reading of Saint Augustine. "If these principles are true, as I judge them to be from reading a good portion of Saint Augustine, after a while they will astonish the world." And again: "I am still working at Saint Augustine, which I read with the greatest avidity and profit (in my opinion), having now reached the seventh volume, and having read the important books twice or three times. I am more astounded every day at the greatness

and depth of his mind, and that his doctrine is so little known among the learned, not only of our own time, but for centuries past. For, to speak plainly, I firmly believe that with the exception of heretics there are none who have corrupted religion more than those babblers of the school you know. If it were to be set up in the old style, which is that of truth, latter-day theology in great part would no longer have the appearance of theology. This makes me greatly admire the wonderful way in which God preserves His spouse from error. I would wish to speak at length, but for that we should require many weeks, perhaps months. Everything I am saying is sufficiently plain from the unchangeable principles; and though the Jesuits and Jacobins should dispute till the Day of Judgment, as long as they follow the lines they have adopted, they should only go more astray, both the one and the other being a thousand miles from the truth. I shall not presume to tell any one what I think (according to the principles of Saint Augustine) of a great part of the opinions of the present day, especially on grace and predestination, lest I should have to go to Rome, like others, before the whole matter is matured and completed. If I am not permitted to speak, I shall be quite content, at least, to have abandoned the extraordinary opinions that the presumption of these men has introduced. This study has entirely deprived me of the ambition which I might have had for a chair in the university, for then I should either remain silent or risk speaking, and my conscience would not permit me to speak out. But God will change everything when He thinks fit; this is what I have always told you. I shall tell you more, if God wills that we should meet.”<sup>1</sup>

As a matter of fact, the two friends met about November 1621, first in Louvain, and probably afterwards in Paris. Prepared now by three years of study, they agreed to slowly and with great secrecy carry out their design of reforming the Church in her doctrine and discipline. It is to this period that the affair at Bourg-Fontaine is assigned. The two friends were said to have joined five or six others of this Carthusian monastery, and united to ruin revealed religion by substituting deism, and even atheism. This is one of those malicious inventions that are to be found everywhere and at all periods of controversy. That Jansenius, the Abbé Saint Cyran and others should have met at Bourg-Fontaine is very possible; that they should have deplored the sad state of the Church and the necessity of regenerating

<sup>1</sup> Sainte-Beuve (*Port Royal*), vol. i. p. 306.

her, nothing is more probable; but that they contemplated suppressing her and substituting atheism, is to say entirely too much. Nobody is less an atheist than Jansenius, and nobody less a naturalist than Saint Cyran. Neither in their writings nor in their conversations, neither in their lives nor in their deaths, is there ever any tendency to deism. On the contrary, they were inclined to the opposite, to religious fanaticism and excessive austerity. They contemplated not the destruction of the Church, but her regeneration according to their false notions. Shortly afterwards they parted, mutually promising to use the greatest discretion; and henceforth, as a matter of fact, their correspondence, though much more frequent, was carried on in a secret style only understood by themselves.

While Jansenius, now in Louvain, was absorbed in the study of Saint Augustine and was beginning to write the *Augustinus*, Saint Cyran, who had come to Paris, was skilfully gathering round him a party and insinuating his opinions. Becoming acquainted with M. d'Andilly, he was introduced by him to his sister, Mother Marie-Angélique, the young abbess and reformer of Port-Royal. She brought him to the convent, and placed, alas! her soul, her enthusiasm, her angelic purity and her influence at the service of his detestable doctrines.

While Saint Cyran was thus establishing himself in the Abbey of Port-Royal, he was also making his way into the Oratory, where M. de Bérulle, attracted by his piety, received him with a cordiality he was soon to abuse. He also visited M. Bourdoise, who likewise received him with open arms. Why not receive a man so grave, so humble, so cordial, so friendly to the Church, who assisted on bended knees at benediction, wore the soutane and surplice, and chanted? "If he has peculiar opinions, it is not for Adrien Bourdoise to judge of them; he is not learned, as is well known."

But eminent as were these persons, Saint Cyran saw one greater still, and left no artifice untried in order to reach him. Saint Vincent de Paul was simplicity and uprightness itself—nay more, charity and benevolence. He suspected no evil, and to convince him of it, it was necessary to prove it twenty times. For his part, Saint Cyran lost no occasion of helping Saint Vincent, and by means of his friends, the first President le Jay, and Advocate-General Bignon, rendered, as a matter of fact, real service to our saint and his Congregation. Saint Cyran, cautious and dissembling, said little at first about his opinions of the state of the Church and his projected reform. By degrees, however,

when he believed he had won over that beautiful soul, so simple and so confiding, he began to speak out. One day the conversation turned on a point of Calvin's doctrine, and he undertook to defend it. "Do you think so, sir?" interrupted Saint Vincent. "Undoubtedly," replied Saint Cyran. "Calvin had not such a bad case, but badly defended it; he meant well, but expressed himself ill." Another day, when Saint Cyran was defending a doctrine condemned by the Council of Trent: "O sir," exclaimed Saint Vincent, "you are going too far; that doctrine has been condemned! What! do you wish me to believe a single fallible doctor like yourself rather than the whole Church, which is the 'pillar of truth'? She teaches me one thing, and you maintain the very opposite. O sir, how can you venture to prefer your own judgment to that of the wisest heads in the world, and of so many holy prelates assembled at the Council of Trent, who have decided this point!"—"The Council of Trent!" sharply replied Saint Cyran with disgust. "Speak to me no more of that Council. It was a council of the Pope and schoolmen, of intrigues and factions."

The saint was profoundly moved by such language; but far from abandoning Saint Cyran, he felt all the more bound to show him affection, in order to be able to intervene and make himself thoroughly acquainted with his views. He therefore continued to see him and showed him the greatest attention. Saint Cyran, mistaking the motives of Saint Vincent's conduct, became bolder. One day while visiting him, Saint Vincent found him in his room absorbed in reading. Not to interrupt him, the saint remained for a few minutes motionless and in silence. Then Saint Cyran, raising his head and looking towards him, said: "Do you see, M. Vincent, what I am reading? It is the Sacred Scripture. God has given me a perfect understanding of it and great light for its explanation. Hence I shall presume to say that the Sacred Scripture is clearer in my mind than it is in itself."<sup>1</sup>

Another day, Saint Vincent, having said mass at Notre-Dame, thought of paying the Abbé Saint Cyran a visit, as he lived closed by. He found him shut up in his library, from which he came out at once, quite excited. "I suspect, sir," said the saint with a winning smile, "you were writing down something that God enlightened you with this morning at prayer."—"Quite true, replied the Abbé, in a transport; "I acknowledge God has given and is giving me great light. He has shown me that the Church no longer exists."

<sup>1</sup> Maynard, vol. ii. p. 240.

—“No longer any Church, sir !”—“No, there is no longer any Church. God has made known to me that she has not been in existence for five or six hundred years. Before that the Church was a mighty river of clear water, but now what seems to be the Church is only mire. The bed of this beautiful river is still the same, but not the water.”—“What, sir ! will you rather believe your private opinions than the word of our Lord Jesus Christ, who said He would build His Church upon a rock, and that the gates of hell should not prevail against it ? The Church is His spouse, and He will never abandon her.”—“It is true,” said Saint Cyran, “that Jesus Christ has built His Church upon a rock, but there is a time to build and a time to pull down. She was His spouse, but now she is an adulteress, a prostitute, and therefore it is He has repudiated Her and wishes that another more faithful to Him should be substituted.”—“I beg of you, sir,” said the saint sadly, “distrust your own judgment, which suggests sentiments very far removed from the respect we owe to the Church.”—“But you yourself, sir,” sharply retorted Saint Cyran, “do you know precisely what the Church is ?”—“The Church, sir, as we learned when children, in the catechism, is the congregation of all the faithful under the guidance of the Pope and legitimate pastors.”—“Tut, tut ! you only know high Dutch.”—“But, sir, this is the language of the Church herself.”—“You are an utter ignoramus, and instead of being at the head of your Congregation, you deserve to be driven out of it altogether ; I am only surprised that you are tolerated at all.”—“Alas ! sir, I am more surprised than you, for I am even more ignorant than you say, and if they did me justice they would not fail to send me away.”<sup>1</sup>

What a beautiful conversation ! See here the soul of Saint Vincent de Paul, the strength of his faith, the depth of his humility. Never was Saint Cyran better unmasked. Saint Vincent returned dumbfounded, but without feeling that he should abandon such a soul—rather determined to save it. Learning that Saint Cyran was about to leave Paris for his abbey, he resolved to make a great effort to enlighten him. Having disposed him to receive advice, Saint Vincent spoke of their obligation to obey the Church and to respect the decisions of the Council of Trent. Then taking up the propositions previously supported by Saint Cyran, and already alluded to, he showed him that they were contrary to Catholic Doctrine. “You are lost,” said he in conclusion, “if you entangle yourself further in

<sup>1</sup> Maynard.

this labyrinth of error. At any rate, you will go alone, or at least neither my Congregation nor myself will follow you." Led on by his zeal and charity, the saint became more and more animated, and towards the end of the interview, spoke with such force and persuasiveness, that Saint Cyran stood silent, not having a word to say.

Having reached his abbey in Poitou, Saint Cyran thought he should make some reply, and wrote a long and intentionally obscure letter, gliding over, without explanation, the points to which Saint Vincent had objected, and trying to regain his friendship by reminding him of all the services which he had done him.

This crooked way of insinuating his doctrine, then disavowing it, first advancing, then withdrawing, Saint Cyran adopted not only before Saint Vincent, but before eminent persons, so much so that it was noised through Paris and reached even Richelieu, who, anxious for peace in the Church as well as in the State, began to feel uneasy and to watch more closely.

In 1632 a large volume written in Latin appeared, and was entitled *Aurelius*. It was Saint Cyran's ; but far from putting his name to it, he disowned it and enveloped it in such a mystery, that he could never be shown to be its author. The teaching in it was not sound. It misrepresented the true constitution of the Church, by exalting the power of bishops, and placing them almost on a level with the Pope. On the other hand, priests were made the equals of bishops. The Church was no longer a monarchy, it was a republic, the divine character of which was lost in the course of ages. As regarded morals and discipline, the errors were no less grave. It was wrong, says the author, to abolish public penance, and it must be restored. The power to absolve was exaggerated. Absolution should only be given after the penance had been performed, and it was the latter with repentance that remitted sins, rather than the absolution, which did little more than declare them remitted. In fine, it was a perversion of the true doctrine of the Church to allow sinners so easily and frequently to the holy table. Communion is an awful mystery, very few are worthy of approaching it, and then only after long preparation.

These doctrines, some contained in the *Aurelius*, others in the discourses of Saint Cyran and his adherents, were no longer mere theories. They were put in practice. At Port-Royal, for example, Mother Agnes kept the sisters and children fifteen months from confession. She did not feel it the slightest to be



deprived of the sacraments, and would have passed her life without feeling it. Mother Angélique herself allowed five months to pass, and once even Easter Sunday, without communicating. At Saint-Merri, the curé, M. du Hamel, had re-established public penances, and divided the penitents into four classes. Those guilty only of secret sins comprised the first, who assisted together at the office near the end of the church, and separated from the other parishioners by four paces. The second class were those who had quarrelled with their neighbours, but without scandal, and they were placed outside the church under the vestibule. Thirdly, there were those who had committed some scandalous sin, and they were placed in the cemetery. Lastly, hardened sinners were on a little hill, from which they could see the entrance of the church. All the penitents were to remain barefooted and bareheaded during the office, and moreover, add other mortifications, such as fasting, public disciplining and hair shirts.<sup>1</sup> Even in some churches public scourgings were established, and great disorders were to be feared.

Worn out with all this agitation, Richelieu determined to put an end to it with one stroke. He had the Abbé Saint Cyran arrested by night and confined in the prison at Vincennes. The people of Paris becoming indignant at such arbitrariness, when the murmurs reached the Cardinal, he remarked, "If Luther and Calvin had been treated similarly, we should not have seen the world on fire."

Richelieu, however, did not succeed here. The arrest only magnified Saint Cyran and threw an aureola of fame around him; while at the same time his papers, which had been seized, read, and discussed, put an end to the secrecy that had hitherto prevailed.

All Paris was talking of the arrest, and a thousand reports were spread. Merely to mention Saint Vincent as an instance, it was said, but without any foundation, that the very evening of the arrest, the saint visited Saint Cyran's nephew, M. Barcos, and expressed his deep regret. It was also reported that he had a confidential letter sent to the prisoner, warning him to be very guarded in his replies, and to give them only in writing, lest he might be made to say something that he might not intend. M. Molé was also said to have warned Saint Cyran to leave no margin, but to fill the pages, lest something might be added; "for," said he, "he has to deal with odd people."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Faillon, vol. ii. p. 245.

<sup>2</sup> Sainte-Beuve.

Again, it was rumoured that Richelieu, knowing the intimate relations between Saint Vincent and Saint Cyran, had sent for our saint and endeavoured to make him speak, but that the latter maintained a prudent silence which irritated the Cardinal, who summarily dismissed him, scratching his head, as he usually did when annoyed.

It was at this time that God had prepared for our saint a consolation of inestimable value. This was the arrival in Paris of the venerable Mother de Chantal, who, now in her sixty-ninth and last year, foundress of eighty-six houses, had come to bid a last farewell to her daughters in Paris. Thus Saint Vincent again met that admirable woman, whose son he claimed to be, whom he called his mother, his only mother, and whom he venerated with a filial affection. "Oh, my dear mother," he wrote, "permit me to have the happiness of enjoying still a place in your amiable heart!" And again: "Oh, what affection God gives me for my dear mother, whom I love most affectionately!" Although she was only four years older, and he had been her confessor and director in Paris, he considered himself her son. He revered her for her incomparable virtues, her natural gifts, which were so exalted and so exceptionally united in the same person. He found in her "an upright spirit, but prudent, mild, yet resolute to an eminent degree." He envied her activity. "O my mother, ask of God for me," he wrote, "the virtue of diligence in His service, a virtue which He has so abundantly bestowed upon you!" He admired her firmness united to so much sweetness. "I shall endeavour to obey you with regard to the house in the Faubourg, and to do as you desire, if you implore God to give me a share of that firmness which He has joined to your sweetness." He had absolute confidence in her judgment, submitting to her his plans and undertakings, and humbly asking her advice, even in matters intimately connected with his Congregation. He explained to her with not less openness the improvements which he wished to see in hers, but with what humility! Saint Vincent desired to have a visitor-general for all the houses of the Visitation, but Saint Chantal would not consent. "O God," he wrote, "how completely I submit my will and judgment, not doubting that it is the will of God, since it is that of my worthy mother, my most deserving mother, my only mother, whom, after our Lord, I honour and love more tenderly than any child ever did his!" But nothing equals the incomparable testimony he rendered to her shortly afterwards, when he declares that he had been

acquainted with her for more than twenty years, that he had always found her excelling in all virtues, in humility, mortification, obedience, zeal, love of God, and that during all that time he had never remarked in her any imperfection.<sup>1</sup>

The admiration Saint Vincent had for Saint Chantal was reciprocated. She thanked God every day for having granted her daughters in Paris such a director. She thought herself unworthy to be his daughter. She opened to him her heart and her conscience with the simplicity of a child, and great was her joy to think that now, being on the brink of the grave, she should see once more in Paris the saintly director of her soul. O happy moments when two souls, penetrated with the love of God, reflected on each other the rays of the Divine Sun that consumed them! What respect! What holy admiration! How consoling it must have been for Saint Chantal to lay open her soul to her holy director before presenting it to the Sovereign Judge. What joy for Saint Vincent to contemplate that humility, simplicity and uprightness; but what a contrast with the spectacle of artifice and duplicity presented by Saint Cyran, Mother Angélique, and rising Jansenism!

In order to understand the relations which existed between Saint Vincent and Saint Chantal, it should be remembered that in the year 1619, when the Order of the Visitation had just been established in Paris, Saint Francis de Sales, wishing to entrust the direction of his daughters to a priest endowed with all the qualities requisite for so important a ministry, chose Saint Vincent de Paul. He was then little known in Paris, and filled no important charge; but the holy Bishop, with that discernment for which he was remarkable, had recognised him as that man of God, that director, whose portrait he had drawn in his *Introduction to the Devout Life*. Saint Vincent held this office till his death, that is to say, for forty years. Saint Chantal came from time to time to Paris and thus had opportunities of meeting him. She conversed intimately with him both about the affairs of her soul and of her institute. Since the death of Saint Francis de Sales she had given him her entire confidence, keeping up an uninterrupted correspondence with him, in which one must admire the mutual respect and the pious esteem those two great souls had for each other. We must not be astonished, therefore, at the vision we are about to relate, the account of which is in the words of Saint Vincent himself. Saint Vincent was anxious to retain her in Paris. The winter was approaching,

<sup>1</sup> "Letters," vol. i p. 385

and November had begun bleak and cold, so he feared the journey should prove fatal. But Mother de Chantal had accomplished the object of her visit ; why then, remain longer ? Hence she started on November 11, and a month later, as Saint Vincent foresaw, she died at Moulins, in the arms of Mme. de Montmorency, on December 13, 1641.

The moment Saint Vincent received intelligence of her immediate danger, he knelt down to pray for her, and then it was he had the vision of the two globes, which we must hear from his own mouth. He wrote it to the Daughters of the Visitation to console them in their great affliction. After the most superlative praise, the more worthy of notice coming from one usually so reserved, he continues :

“ I have no doubt that God will one day manifest the holiness of Mother de Chantal, as I understand He has already done in many places and ways, one of which happened to a person worthy of credence, who, I assure you, would prefer to die rather than tell a lie.” (The saint was speaking of himself.)

“ This person, on getting news of her extreme danger, placed himself on his knees to pray for her. Immediately he saw a small globe as of fire, which ascending, united with a second, and then joined a third, larger and more luminous than the others. He was interiorly enlightened that the first globe was the soul of Mother de Chantal, the second that of Saint Francis de Sales, and the third the Divine Essence. The soul of this worthy mother was united with that of their holy Founder and both with God, their sovereign Lord.

“ Moreover, the same person, who is a priest, offering the adorable sacrifice for the deceased immediately after her death, and being at the memento for the dead, thought of praying for her, as she might be atoning for some words she had spoken, which seemed to be a venial fault ; and then again he had a similar vision of the same globes and their union. An interior conviction told him that this soul was happy and did not require prayers, and so convinced was the priest of this, that he seemed to see her in that state every time he thought of her.

“ What might raise a doubt as regards this vision,” adds Saint Vincent, “ is, that this person had such esteem for the holiness of Mother de Chantal that he could never read her letters without weeping, feeling that it was God alone who could inspire

such sentiments. Consequently this vision might be the work of his imagination. But what led him to think it was a true vision was that he is not accustomed to have visions and never had any but this. In testimony of which I have signed and sealed the present document.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “Letters,” vol. i. p. 384.

## CHAPTER V.

SAINT VINCENT'S OPPOSITION TO JANSENISM (*continued*)

1643.

IN the midst of all this, Richelieu died on December 4, 1642. The immediate consequence of his death was Saint Cyran's release. Even before the investigation was finished and the verdict arrived at, Louis XIII. had wished him to be set at liberty. But the inflexible Cardinal opposed it, saying such dangerous characters should always be kept in check. Hence Saint Cyran was detained in Vincennes, but in a comparatively easy confinement, receiving visits from the most distinguished people to whom he taught his doctrine; writing letters in abundance, and feasting on the reading of the *Augustinus*. This book had just appeared, and here and there he found many things to be toned down, but yet he said that after Saint Paul and Saint Augustine a third could not be mentioned who spoke more divinely on grace. Thus he was secretly training his disciples, particularly Arnault, who was becoming more and more important, and on the death of Jansenius considered himself the leader of the party. But all these facts, as history now reveals, were then buried in obscurity, so much so that Saint Cyran's release was looked upon by many as reparation for an injustice.

Saint Cyran did not long enjoy his liberty. He died two months after from apoplexy, which carried him off in a day. His obsequies were very solemn, attended by many archbishops, bishops, and a large number of distinguished laity. Was Saint Vincent present? Did he sprinkle the holy water over the remains? It is warmly disputed, but we see no reason why he should not have gone. Saint Cyran was not condemned, and if he had peculiar opinions, he had not made them public, and died in exterior communion with the Church. Bishops, princes and men of rank were present. If it were at all possible for Saint Vincent he was bound to be there; his faith did not forbid him and his heart urged him.

But if Saint Vincent was so kind in his manner, he was inflexible when there was a question of doctrine. Never, even when most intimate with Saint Cyran, could he listen without a

shudder to the least word that might wound his faith, however slightly. "Do you know, sir," he wrote to a priest of his Congregation, "this new error of Jansenism is one of the most dangerous that has ever troubled the Church. I am very specially bound to praise and thank God that the leaders of this doctrine, with whom I was well acquainted, were unable to convince me. I cannot tell you the pains they took and the arguments they used to win me; but I opposed them, among other things, with the authority of the Council of Trent, which is manifestly against them; and when I saw they still held out, instead of arguing, I quietly repeated my Credo, and thus have remained firm in the faith."<sup>1</sup>

What already his instinct caused him to dislike, his reason forced him to reject when instead of murmuring and insinuating talk, the sense of which might be misunderstood, he had under his eyes the two great works into which the Jansenists had condensed their double error. The first, written by Jansenius, Bishop of Ypres, and entitled *Augustinus*, had appeared in 1640. But this book, written in Latin, on the most obscure points of the doctrine of grace, required time to reach France, and in 1643 it had not provoked much comment. The second was entitled *On Frequent Communion*, which might be more properly styled *Against Frequent Communion*, written in French, and although somewhat heavy, was easier to understand, and became the talk of learned men as well as of fashionable ladies. It was certainly inspired by Saint Cyran, much of it written by him, and appeared only two months before his death, August 1643. But he was unwilling to put his name to it, and had it signed by the most learned of his adherents, Antoine Arnault. It was the latter work that Saint Vincent read first, and he was horror-stricken. How can anybody think that it is necessary to defend Saint Vincent against the accusations of the Jansenists who tried to win him? His heart alone is sufficient to defend him. His idea of God, so good, so tender, so loving, so merciful, so willing to pardon, is irreconcilable with the harsh doctrines of Jansenism. Saint Cyran said, "God is terrible;" Saint Vincent, "God is good." Saint Cyran, "God did not die for all men;" Saint Vincent, "He died for all, and had it been necessary He would have died for each one in particular." Saint Cyran said, "Communion is a terrible mystery, and hardly anybody worthy to approach it;" but Saint Vincent, "Communion is so holy, that undoubtedly nobody is worthy of

<sup>1</sup> Sainte-Beuve.

approaching ; but it is also so sweet, so amiable, such a masterpiece of infinite love, that nobody can approach too frequently." That is Saint Vincent de Paul. Oh, no ! he was not, he could not be a Jansenist. He had not, he could not have anything but a horror of such a doctrine. He was kind and affectionate in the beginning to Saint Cyran ; then, grieved but prudent, he knew more than he wished to disclose ; ever hopeful, and never wishing to condemn him whom the Church had not condemned. He attended, perhaps, Saint Cyran's obsequies to cover everything with charity ; but once the Church had spoken, once Jansenism had been unmasked, then he was as determined and as energetic against its doctrines as he had been gentle and patient with its advocates. Behold Saint Vincent de Paul.

With what exquisite tact and admirable common-sense he marks each page of the book entitled *Frequent Communion* ! What zeal in defending piety, in maintaining the frequentation of the sacraments ! To those who put forward the teaching of this book as a reason for not approaching holy communion, he said : " It is true that there are only too many who abuse this divine sacrament—especially myself, wretch that I am, more than anybody. I beg of you to assist me in asking pardon of God. But the reading of this book, instead of attracting men to frequent communion, only repels them. No longer is witnessed, even at Easter, the concourse of people going to communion that used to be. Many curés in Paris deplore having far less communicants than hitherto. Saint-Sulpice had three thousand less. The curé of Saint-Nicolas-du-Chardonnet told us lately that, on a visitation of his parish after Easter, he discovered fifteen hundred parishioners who had not gone to communion, and it was the same in other places. Few now went on the first Sundays and great feasts."

To others who boasted of the good effect the reading of the *Frequent Communion* produced, he said : " It may be true that some persons in France and Italy have derived advantage from this book, but for the hundred who perhaps have profited in Paris and become more respectful in the use of the sacraments, there are at least ten thousand, whom it has injured by keeping them away altogether." He dwelt on this main point, and proved it. " As to alleging that this book deters people from approaching the sacraments, I tell you it is quite true, and although it pretends not, in order the better to attain its end, yet it urgently dissuades people from going to confession and communion. As a matter of fact, does it not highly commend,



on page 36 of the Preface, the piety of those who through humility would defer their communion till the end of their lives? Does it not contend that God is better pleased by that humility than by all kinds of good works? Is it not said, in chapter ii. of Part iii., that it is to speak unworthily of the King of Heaven to say that He is honoured by our communion, and that Jesus Christ can receive only shame and outrage from frequent communicants? As far as I am concerned, I frankly confess that if I thought as much of M. Arnault's book as you do, not only would I renounce for ever mass and holy communion through the spirit of humility, but I would even abhor the sacrament, if it were what he represents it to be in the case of those who communicate in the dispositions required by the Church, namely, a snare of Satan and a poison that kills souls." The saint adds, with a flash of irony and indignation: "Were we to close our eyes to everything else except what he says in many places of the admirable dispositions without which he would not have us communicate, will any one be found who is so confident of his virtue as to believe that he is fit to communicate worthily? This degree of perfection belongs only to M. Arnault, who, having laid down dispositions so excellent that even a Saint Paul would not have ventured to communicate, nevertheless boasts several times in his apology that he himself says mass every day. In that his humility is as admirable as his charity towards those wise directors who are the ordinary objects of his abuse. To conclude, in my humble opinion, it is heresy to say that to wish to defer communicating till near death is a great act of virtue, for the Church commands us to communicate at least every year."

If persons could no longer approach holy communion since the requisite dispositions were so perfect, how could priests say mass? Mass should be abolished, as Saint Vincent was forced to remark, thus: "Just as this author estranges people from communion, he will not be concerned at the churches remaining without mass, since he makes no scruple of applying all those admirable effects which Ven. Bede declares attached to the celebration of the holy sacrifice, to abstaining from offering it through a spirit of penance. This may be seen in chapter xl. of Part iii., where he makes even more of this penance than of the sacrifice of the mass. Now is it not evident that such language strongly tends to make priests neglect offering the holy mass, since they gain as much by not saying mass as by saying it, and even, according to M. Arnault, they gain more? For in praising

those who seldom go to communion, he must esteem it much more meritorious to abstain from saying mass."

At the same time that Saint Vincent was energetically striving to maintain the custom of frequent communion, he was also strongly opposing the so-called restoration of public penances. They only served to deter people from confession, in placing an interval of four or five months between confession and absolution, under pretext that the latter could only be received with perfect contrition. "It is true," says Saint Vincent, "that Saint Charles Borromeo has stirred up the spirit of penance in his diocese, but not so as to withdraw people from confession and holy communion, except in the case prescribed by the canons, which we try to put in practice in proximate occasions, enmities, and public sins. But this is very different from saying that he ordained public penances for secret sins, and the performance of the satisfaction before receiving absolution, as the book in question requires. Never do we see him inflicting public penance or deferring holy communion for every kind of mortal sin, nor desiring to have an interval of three or four months between confession and absolution, like those so-called reformers who frequently do so for ordinary sins. Hence, although absolution may be too freely given to all kinds of sinners, which Saint Charles deplures, it does not follow that he approved of the extremities to which M. Arnault goes, since they are diametrically opposed to a number of regulations the saint lays down."

And when it was objected that this practice of penance, and even of public penance before absolution, went back to Apostolic times, and that the Church could not interfere without ceasing to be the pillar of truth, Saint Vincent said: "The Church never changes as to her faith, but may she not change as to her discipline? Has not God, who is immutable in Himself, changed His action with regard to men? Have not our Lord and the Apostles done so? How then does this man say that the Church should err if she did not embrace those penances practised in the past? Is this orthodox?"

If our saint was so moved by reading Arnault's *Frequent Communion*, he was still more so when he began to study the *Augustinus* of Jansenius. The *Frequent Communion*, it is true, only touched on some of the most necessary practices of our religion, but the *Augustinus*, on the contrary, attacked its very constitution. A controversy arose about this book, in which not only theologians took part, but men of the world, for it was

the talk in the salons as well as in the universities. The letters of Mme. de Sevigné re-echo this strife.

To secure that their efforts might not be spent in vain, Nicolas Cornet, a doctor of theology, Bossuet's tutor, "a man of long-standing distinction, simplicity and probity," condensed the large volume into five propositions, "which are," says Bossuet, "the soul of the work—the book itself, in fact." Let us hear Bossuet in his funeral oration of Nicolas Cornet, as he takes occasion to exhibit his own master mind on this whole affair of Jansenism. With one word he sheds a light upon this dark question. "In our time," he says, "two dangerous maladies have afflicted the Church. Some doctors have adopted an unfortunate and unwise indulgence, a fatal compassion which makes them too lenient towards sinners. Others, not less extreme, have subjected souls to the most unjust rigorism, not tolerating any weakness whatever. Through excess they have destroyed the spirit of piety, everywhere making out new crimes and overwhelming human weakness by adding to the yoke God has imposed upon us. Who does not see that such rigour fans presumption, fosters disregard, feeds a haughty discontent and an ostentatious singularity, paints virtue too severe, the Gospel too exacting, and Christianity impossible?"<sup>1</sup>

Haughty discontent, ostentatious singularity, a rigorism that fosters disregard—how truly is this Saint Cyran and his school.

Bossuet continues: "The climax of this new tempest occurred while Cornet was Syndic of the Theological Faculty. Seeing the winds rise, the clouds gather, and the storm become worse and worse, wise and calm as he was, he set about attentively considering this new doctrine and its supporters. He saw that St. Augustine, whom he looked upon as the most enlightened and the most profound of all the doctors, had left to the Church a most holy and Apostolic exposition of the doctrine of grace. He also saw that either through the natural weakness of the human intellect, or because of the depth and delicacy of the questions involved, or rather in consequence of the condition necessary and inseparable from our faith during this night of darkness and obscurity, this celestial doctrine is surrounded with impenetrable difficulties. So true indeed is this, that there was danger lest conclusions ruinous to human liberty might be insensibly deduced. Then he considered with how much reason the various schools of theologians and the entire Church laboured to prevent such false inferences. On the other hand,

<sup>1</sup> Bossuet.

he saw that these new doctors were so enamoured with them, that in place of rejecting them they adopted them as their own. Most of these conclusions, which all theologians had ever regarded as difficult objections, to meet which a clear understanding of the doctrine of Saint Augustine and the Church was essential, the new doctors regarded, on the contrary, as acquisitions necessary to be preserved, and what seemed to everybody else a rock that threatened shipwreck, to them seemed the safest port to make for."

In fine, Bossuet, great man as he was, does not try to depreciate the leaders of Jansenism. "Our wise and cautious Syndic," he continues, "judged that those of whom we have been speaking might be described almost as follows: they were distinguished, eloquent, daring, determined, intelligent, and strong-minded men, but more capable of destroying than building up, and more inclined to confuse Christian truths than to reduce them to their natural unity. However, minds became agitated, and things more and more entangled. This industrious and powerful party attracted at least, if it did not completely captivate, the youth and talent of the schools."

How well and how beautifully all this is expressed, while at the same time what a quiet and passing light it sheds over the grave benches of the Sorbonne. Going deeper, Bossuet praises the epitome (the five propositions), and refers to it as a "true quintessence." Nobody was better made up than Cornet on the vital point of this question. He understood thoroughly the differences between the various opinions of the schools, how far they agree and where they begin to differ. It is this experience, this exquisite knowledge, this combination of the best lights of the Sorbonne, that has given us this epitome. The propositions separate truth from error, and are, so to speak, the pith of the new opinions, the touchstone by which all may reject them.

Denounced to the Sorbonne in July 1649, these five propositions were referred to Rome in a letter signed by nearly eighty-five bishops. Our saint worked hard to obtain these signatures. He wrote on all sides, and even got Anne of Austria to apply to the Pope to hasten the definition of faith on the point. "I have made my prayer," he said, "for three months on the doctrine of grace, and God, by new lights every day, has confirmed me in the belief that our Lord died for all, and that He wished to save every one." And so, too, as regards the question of grace being given to all and sufficient for all:

“Truly I cannot understand how a God, so infinitely good, who every day stretches forth His hands to embrace sinners, *expandi manus meas quotidie*, could have the heart to refuse grace to all those who ask it, and allow Himself to be excelled in goodness by David, who sought among his enemies some one to whom he might be merciful.”

It is thus Saint Vincent discovers in his own heart, in the intuitions of his spiritual life, the true answer to the cruel sophisms of this heresy.

While Saint Vincent was collecting the signatures for the letter to be forwarded to the Pope denouncing the five propositions, he was uniting with M. Olier and M. Bretonvilliers, to send theologians to Rome to show the danger to which these propositions were exposing the Church of France. The Jansenists had already sent others, especially Père des Mares, the celebrated Oratorian. It is not our business to recount the endless discussions which then took place; the meetings of the special congregations appointed by the Pope, and at ten or twelve of which, each lasting for three or four hours, Innocent X. thought it his duty to be present; or the last and solemn sitting, at which Père des Mares spoke for four hours before the Pope; and the innumerable other conferences of a similar kind, until at last, on June 9, 1653, Innocent X. having recommended himself to God in prayer, summoned one of his secretaries and dictated the Bull *Cum occasione*. The same evening it was promulgated in Rome, and immediately forwarded to France.

The joy of Saint Vincent when the Bull arrived was profound. He immediately wrote to Mgr. Alain de Solminihac, Bishop of Cahors: “My lord, I am sending you most agreeable news—the condemnation of the Jansenists, their five propositions having been declared heretical on June 9. The Bull was published the same day in Rome, and reached Paris on the feast of Saint Peter. Their Majesties received it very warmly, and his Eminence is about to put it in force. All Paris is rejoicing, at least those better disposed, and the others declare their willingness to submit. M. Singlin, who, with M. Arnault, is one of the leaders, has acknowledged that the Holy See must be obeyed, and M. Hamel, curé of Saint-Merri, one of the foremost, is in like dispositions and ready to publish the Bull in his church. Many of the others, as M. and Mme. de Liancourt, declare they are no longer what they were. In a word, it is expected that all will acquiesce. Not, indeed, that some did not find it difficult to submit, saying that although the opinions of

Jansenius are condemned, theirs are not. I only heard this from one person. So great a blessing my lord, is this decision, that everybody here rejoices, and those who saw the evil that the strife was causing cannot feel sufficiently grateful.”<sup>1</sup>

At the same time he went to Port-Royal, having been told that the recluses, the disciples of Saint Cyran, had resolved to fully submit to the Bull. He spent several hours with them, tenderly congratulated them on their obedience to the Holy See, and showed them every mark of esteem, affection and confidence. Alas ! that absolute submission to the Pope was destined to last but a day.

We may well conclude that a man so zealous to shield from error both the sheep and their shepherds was ever watchful over his own Congregation and each of its members. “O Jesus,” he would say, “it is not expedient for us to maintain different opinions in the little Company ; we must always be of one mind, otherwise we shall be torn asunder among ourselves ! And the remedy is to submit to the Superior’s opinion. I say it is not to the superior that we submit, but to God, to the Popes, the councils, the saints ; and should anyone be unwilling to do so, it will be best for him to leave, and that is what the Company wishes. Many orders in the Church afford us this example. The Discalced Carmelites, in their chapter last year, ordained that their professors of theology should teach the long-established opinions of the Church and oppose novelties. Every one knows that the Jesuits act likewise, while the Congregation of Saint Geneviève follows the opinions of Saint Augustine, which we do too, explaining, however, Saint Augustine by the Council of Trent, and not the Council of Trent by Saint Augustine, for the first is infallible, the second is not.” One day he was asked what should be done to moderate the harshness towards the Port-Royal party. “Why drive them to extremities ? Would it not be better to come to an agreement ? They are disposed for it if treated with more moderation, and there is no one better suited than you to soften the irritation on both sides, and to effect a complete reconciliation.”—“Sir,” Saint Vincent merely replied, “when a decision is given, there is nothing to be done but submit to it. What union can we make with them if they have not an honest and sincere intention of submitting ? How can we modify what the Church has decided ? It is a matter of faith, which cannot be altered or tampered with, and consequently we cannot accommodate it to suit their

<sup>1</sup> “Letters,” vol. i. p. 554.

sentiments. It is for them to submit their private judgment, and confidently unite with us by a true and sincere submission to the head of the Church. Without that, sir, the only thing we can do is to pray for their conversion."

It was by such vigour of thought, such force of expression, such ardour and firmness of doctrine, that Saint Vincent preserved his Congregation from all taint of Jansenism. How admirable! Of the three Congregations seemingly raised up by God for the education of the French clergy, the first was unwillingly and in a mysterious manner led away from this employment, and alone was affected by Jansenism. The other two, that of Saint Vincent de Paul, and that of M. Olier, remained absolutely exempt. Free from all error, as deeply conscious as the Abbé Saint Cyran of the divinity of our Lord, of the grace of His priesthood, of the holiness necessary for priests, but without his exaggerations or excesses, they began to form that great clergy of France which was the wonder of the second half of the seventeenth century, which traversed the wretched and impure eighteenth with little loss, and was still fresh and vigorous enough in 1793 to yield confessors and martyrs, and after exile and persecution, to win the reputation of being the holiest, the purest and the grandest of any clergy.

But even this is not all that Saint Vincent did for the regeneration of the priesthood. We have seen him establish the exercises for the ordinands, the Tuesday Conferences, successfully found ecclesiastical seminaries, skilfully guard the clergy from the blighting doctrine of Jansenism, which would have destroyed their zeal; let us wait a few years more and we shall behold this humble priest enter the Louvre, the palace of kings, take his seat in the Council of Conscience, become its president, and use all his influence to give to the Church holy bishops, without whom the reform of the clergy had been ephemeral and the regeneration of France impossible.

## CHAPTER VI.

DEATH OF LOUIS XIII.—ANNE OF AUSTRIA CALLS SAINT  
VINCENT DE PAUL TO THE COUNCIL OF CONSCIENCE  
—HIS EFFORTS TO HAVE GOOD BISHOPS APPOINTED

1643-1653

FIVE months after Richelieu, Louis XIII. died on May 14, 1643, at the age of forty-two. Fifteen days before, he had summoned Saint Vincent to assist him to make a holy end. Not that there was not around him all the spiritual succour he might desire—Père Birret, his ordinary confessor ; Mgr. Séguier, Bishop of Meaux, his first chaplain ; and Mgr. Cospéan, Bishop of Lisieux, his second chaplain. But he had so often heard of the holiness of Saint Vincent, of his love for the poor, of his efforts for the sanctification of the clergy, and of his great works of charity, that he wished to see him and have his assistance in the hour of death. "The deplorable state of his health warned him that the end was approaching. He saw it with the courage of a hero and the resignation and confidence of a just man, who, wearing a crown, had lived for God alone, detached from grandeurs, pleasures, and even from himself. He was a man who from his labours and trials had always endeavoured to lay up treasures which neither rust nor moth can consume, who had not to deplore pleasures, extravagance, much less war ; in fine, who in all his administration had looked only to God and duty. Still his sins—for who, even among the just, have not something with which to reproach themselves?—his humility, and the terrible judgments of God, kept him in an abasement and holy fear, which, without disturbing his humble confidence, obtained for him more and more of the mercy, grace, and light of which he stood in need. He was very far from thinking well of himself, knowing that it is written, 'He that is just, let him be justified still.' It was to this object he consecrated the remainder of his life, to profit by everything, to increase more and more his interior penance."<sup>1</sup>

Such a king deserved to be assisted in his last moments by a

<sup>1</sup> Saint Simon.



saint, and towards the end of April 1643, fifteen days before his death, he sent for Saint Vincent.

Our humble priest was greatly surprised on receiving such an invitation. He had never seen the King, scarcely met the Queen, and had only some passing relations with Richelieu. Nevertheless, he did not hesitate. There was question of a soul, and as he would have gone to the galleys to save a dying slave, he hastened now to Saint-Germain-en-Laye, to the death-bed of Louis XIII.

The saint's entrance into the chamber of death had a religious dignity and gravity that became the situation. On the threshold he saluted the King with the words, "Sire, *tementi Deum bene erit in extremis.*" To which the King, deeply read in Sacred Scripture, replied by finishing the verse, "*Et in die defunctionis suæ benedicetur.*" Then began those interviews of which the dying man kept the secret, and which the humility of the saint buried in the silence of the grave. A single word, however, has transpired which shows the nature of these visits. The saint spoke to the King of the obligations and terrible responsibility of royalty, placing in the first rank the nomination of bishops. "O M. Vincent!" replied the King, "if I were restored to health, I should nominate no bishop who had not spent three years with you."

At this first visit Saint Vincent remained about eight days, constantly in attendance on the King, exciting in him those sentiments of faith, courage, and resignation to the holy will of God, which were to mark so noble a death.

After eight days an improvement which often precedes death appeared, and Saint Vincent thought he might leave for Paris, where important matters awaited him. He remained in Paris till 11th May, when suddenly the malady became decidedly worse, and death was only three days off. Again the King summoned him, and requested him to remain to the end, which he did.

These last three days were most memorable. At the same time that Louis XIII. was preparing himself to die as a Christian, he was also preparing himself to die as a King, by taking every means to secure the peace and prosperity of France. The future was not without its clouds. His successor was a child of four, entrusted to two guardians in whom he had little confidence. The first was his wife, Anne of Austria, whom he knew to be feeble, fickle, and inclined to Spanish interests, easily led, and constantly changing her counsellors. The second was his

brother, Gaston d'Orleans, dissipated, ambitious, irresolute, destitute of any kind of courage, and possessed of very little sense and discernment. He was ever ready to quarrel, still more so to repent, and at that time the least suited to counsel, support, direct, and govern a kingdom. It is true that Richelieu when dying recommended Mazarin ; but he was only five months in office, and although already giving proofs of his capacity, it was as yet little anticipated what part he was to play in the government of the kingdom. The King, who hardly knew him, was not anxious to make him Prime Minister in place of Richelieu.

The outcome of these reflections was the will Louis XIII. dictated to Chavigny, Minister and Secretary of State, in which Louis nominated the Queen as Regent, and his brother Gaston, Lieutenant-General of the kingdom under her. It was impossible for him to do otherwise ; but he added the Prince de Condé as President of the Council, and all the ministers then in office were to be irremovable members. By this counterpoise he hoped to leave behind him a wise and solid government.

“Having taken this fundamental precaution, he judged it prudent to add another, in order to make this testament as solid as possible. He summoned to his presence all the distinguished persons then at court. The Queen and his brother Gaston was there, and the King ordered the First President at the head of a large deputation from Parliament to enter.

“From his deathbed he addressed them in a speech full of piety, dignity and wisdom, and in presence of the Queen and his brother, explained how he wished the kingdom to be governed until his son reached his majority. He recommended them both to the fidelity of so many illustrious witnesses with an animation that had a striking effect on all. Then leaning back, he astonished and moved them still more by his prudent mingling of courage and tenderness, humility and dignity. They stood listening in admiration to a discourse at once wise, far-seeing and temperate, and delivered, too, with such force and clearness by a dying man on a bed of suffering. He treated his approaching death with the same simplicity and indifference as he should another's. At last, he commanded Chavigny to read his will aloud, slowly and distinctly, that everybody might understand what it contained. This over, the King asked their opinions, and ordered each one to speak freely. It was approved of unanimously. Then he commanded Chavigny to hand the testament to the First President and other deputies, to register it

as a law, since all approved of it. Finally, he dismissed them with every manifestation of tenderness, confidence and dignity, reminding them of the fidelity they had pledged to his successor and to the State. Exhausted as he was, he retained, however, some of the Huguenot lords, whom he exhorted with the affection of a father and a friend, and as a man about to appear before his God, to reflect seriously, calmly and without prejudice, and to return to the bosom of the Church, outside of which there was no salvation. He spoke, too, to some Catholic lords about their disorders and of the importance of being converted in time. And now that those important and final duties had been fulfilled, he wished to think of nothing but preparation for death."<sup>1</sup>

He summoned Saint Vincent, and inquired the best way of doing this. "Sire," replied the saint, "imitate our Lord Jesus Christ, and perfectly submit, as He did, to the will of His heavenly Father: *not My will but Thine be done!*" "O Jesus," answered the holy monarch, "this is what I desire with all my heart. Yes, my God, I repeat it, and wish to do so with the last breath of my life, *Thy will be done!*"

"From his bed he saw the Church of Saint-Denis, and gazed upon it with joy. He had forbidden any great ceremony after his death, and wished that only what was necessary should be carried out. He made the arrangements for his funeral and marked out the route, so as to cause as little trouble as possible. Pointing to the towers of Saint-Denis, he said, 'Behold where I shall soon be, and where I shall remain for a long time. My body will be greatly shaken, for the roads are bad.' He used to speak at length on this subject so frightening to nature, and he did it so simply and naturally, that nobody had the remotest suspicion of affectation; nay, all admired such open and constant firmness, and courage as pious as it was heroic."<sup>2</sup>

The doctors urged him to take a little nourishment, but he had a great repugnance, and seeing the end so near, he thought he was not bound to force himself. Nevertheless, he had a scruple about it, and beckoning to Saint Vincent, "M. Vincent," said he, "the doctors are anxious that I should take nourishment, but I have refused, for I am certainly dying; what do you say?" "Sire," replied Saint Vincent, "the doctors always desire the patient to take nourishment as long as the slightest strength remains, in the hope of recovery. Hence, if your Majesty pleases, it is better to take some." The King, then calling

<sup>1</sup> Saint-Simon.<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

Seguin, ordered some soup. Towards evening he received the last sacraments in the most holy dispositions.

"The next day, May 13, the eve of his death, towards mid-day, God deigned to honour so holy a life and death with an extraordinary grace. Noticing the Prince de Condé among many other lords standing by his bed, the King fixed his eyes upon him, and though the conversation was not of war, said, 'Your son has gained a signal victory.' He alluded to the young Duke d'Enghien and to the victory of Rocroy, which took place a few days after. The Prince de Condé and all present, surprised at this prophecy, doubted whether a prediction so precise and clear, but so unexpectedly given, was the effect of a wandering of his mind, although up to that he had shown no signs of it whatever. As a matter of fact, he replied immediately and most intelligently when they questioned him to ascertain the state of his mind, which remained perfectly sound to the very last. He explained what he had said like those who have prophesied, sometimes using the past for the future, and announced as accomplished what God had revealed to him, although the event only happened a few days afterwards. The victory of Rocroy took place, in reality on May 19. But God was pleased to show it beforehand to His servant and cause him to predict it, in order to exhibit before the world his humility, detachment, solid piety, signal virtues, and to clearly show that his mercy was to be crowned with a crown of justice and eternal happiness.

"On the evening of the 13th, the doctors, noticing their patient becoming sleepy and his eyes heavy, feared that he was about to expire, and told the confessor, who immediately roused the King, saying that the doctors thought it was time to begin the prayers for the dying. Instantly, filled with the spirit of God, he embraced the good priest and thanked him for such good news. Then raising his eyes and hands towards heaven, he repeated the *Te Deum* with such fervour, that the very remembrance of it even now affects me."<sup>1</sup>

Thus the night passed, the saintly King from time to time expressing some touching and exalted sentiments on the happiness of dying, the hope of a better life, and the joy of seeing his Lord and his God. An historian says, no one among ancients or moderns had showed such courage at the point of death.<sup>2</sup>

About ten o'clock the next day he summoned the principal doctor. "Seguin," he said, with a strong voice, "feel my

<sup>1</sup> Saint-Simon

<sup>2</sup> Priolo, quoted by Saint-Simon.

pulse, and tell me, I beg of you, how many hours I have to live; but make certain, for I wish to know the truth." Seguin in silence felt his pulse, and then coolly replied, "Sire, your Majesty can only have two or three hours more." Then joining his hands and looking up to heaven, the King quietly exclaimed, "Well then, my God, with all my heart I am resigned!" Then turning towards Saint Vincent, he said, while stretching out his emaciated arms, "See, M. Vincent, the arms of a King, are they not just like any other man's!" Bouvart, taking his arm in turn, said, "Sire, if I am not mistaken, your Majesty's soul shall soon be delivered from the prison of this body, for your pulse has ceased to beat." "My God," exclaimed the monarch, "have mercy on me!" The prayers for the agonising were begun, which he answered in a weak and faltering voice, and after a few minutes calmly expired in the arms of Saint Vincent de Paul.<sup>1</sup> It was on May 14, that his father, Henry IV., had died—"a remark worthy of notice," says Saint-Simon. "It was the feast of the Ascension, the day of the triumph of Jesus Christ, of the release of the souls of the just and their entrance into heaven."<sup>2</sup>

The next day Saint Vincent wrote: "As long as I have been on earth I never witnessed a more Christian death. I never saw greater union with God, more tranquillity, more fear of the smallest sin, or greater goodness and recollection in a person of such condition." Such language from such a judge fitly closes the eulogium of our greatest King since Saint Louis.

Anne of Austria, who succeeded as mother of Louis XIV. and Regent for him, had not—far from it—the virtue of Louis XIII., though she was a most Christian woman. Whether it was of her own initiative, or moved by the words of Saint Vincent to the late King concerning the terrible responsibility of royalty, especially in the nomination of bishops, one of her first acts was the creation of what is known as the Council of Conscience. The object of this Council was to aid in the selection of persons for benefices. Saint Vincent was made a member, besides Cardinal Mazarin, Chancellor Séguier, M. Charton, Grand Penitentiary of Paris, and the Bishops of Beauvais and Lisieux.

The astonishment of our saint cannot be expressed on hearing of his election. He, who only sighed for a hidden life and devotion to the poor, was unwillingly forced to enter the court, and more alarming still, to assist in the selection of bishops, archbishops, and all the highest dignitaries in the

<sup>1</sup> Maynard, vol. iii., p. 388.

<sup>2</sup> Saint Simon.

Church. This is a delicate matter at any time, but more especially then, when the great families were sending their younger sons into the Church, and claiming for them, even from their youth, and independently of their morals, bishoprics and abbeys. For once our saint was planning how to rid himself of such a burden. He sent some friends to speak for him, and determined even to appeal to the Queen herself, but all proved fruitless before her unbending will. She declared that he should render this service to God and her son, the King.<sup>1</sup> Saint Vincent acceded, although he at once foresaw very clearly the great storms and violent attacks to which he exposed himself on this sea of the court. Experience had taught him that in maintaining justice and piety he was sure to receive many contradictions and persecutions, yet he believed that he could not do better than abandon himself to Divine Providence, resolving always to act uprightly, and under all circumstances to remain faithful to God and the King.”<sup>2</sup>

This position afforded Saint Vincent an *entrée* to the court, and anybody else would have profited by it to come in contact with the Queen as often as possible. Far different was the intention of Saint Vincent. From the beginning he made it a rule never to go to court except to attend the Council of Conscience, or by a formal command of the Queen. It was by no means congenial to him to be among a crowd of courtiers, where, however, many bishops and cardinals were to be met.

He also resolved to go to court in his everyday dress, in his old heavy and patched soutane, which is still preserved as a relic, with his poor woollen cincture, his big shoes and worn-out hat; but all, though extremely poor, were without spot or stain. One day Mazarin, catching his cincture and turning to the Queen, said, “See, madame, how well dressed M. Vincent comes to court, and the fine cincture he has.” The saint merely smiled, and even after this hint from the Cardinal, did not change his costume, but appeared in it before the Queen herself.

When passing through the salons and great halls of the Louvre on his way to attend the Council of Conscience, the lords rose and gave him a profound salute, which he scarcely saw, such was his humility. He passed through quietly, but without stopping to speak, his eyes cast down and his modest deportment were indicative of his great goodness. It was for him a weekly mortification. “I was still very young,” deposed M. Pelletier, Secretary of State under Louis XIV., in giving

<sup>1</sup> Abelly, vol. ii. p. 133.

<sup>2</sup> Abelly,

evidence in the process of the saint's canonisation, "when I first saw the servant of God in the Louvre, and constantly saw him there afterwards. He always had a modest and at the same time a grave dignity. Courtiers, prelates, ecclesiastics, all paid him the greatest respect, which he received with profound humility. On leaving the council, where he had met the noblest of the land, and decided the highest positions in the kingdom, he became as familiar and as simple to the lowest and least as he had been among the slaves of Tunis or among the outcasts of the galley-ships. A holy bishop not having met him since his election to the council, and afterwards seeing him as humble, as affable and ready to oblige as before, could not help exclaiming, 'M. Vincent is always M. Vincent!' It was reported one day that he was marked out for the cardinalate, and the compliments and congratulations were redoubled. But these were only received by him as the thrusts of a dagger. The Roman purple would truly be the purple of martyrdom to his humility."

Another rule which Saint Vincent made from his very entrance to the Council of Conscience was, never to receive anything for himself or those belonging to him. We can understand this as regards himself; but for those belonging to him, for his dear Congregation, for his poor, might he not have profited by his position to ask, or at least accept, something? But he was inflexible. "As Secretary of State," continues M. Pelletier, "I frequently came in contact with M. Vincent. He did more good in France for religion and the Church than anybody I know. But I was specially struck by the fact that at the Council of Conscience, of which he was the most important member, there was never any question of benefiting himself, his Congregation, or the ecclesiastical houses which he had established."

The holy priest felt that if he did not carry this disinterestedness to heroism he should leave himself open to accusations, the very thought of which was sufficient to make him shudder. One day a person offered him 100,000 livres in the name of certain parties who wished to have his vote in the council on a matter not burdensome on the people, but possibly injurious to the clergy. Saint Vincent briefly replied: "God preserve me from such a thing! I would prefer to die rather than do so." On another occasion a distinguished magistrate, eager to procure an abbey for his son, who was unworthy, and fearing especially Saint Vincent's opposition, went to one of the priests

of the Congregation and said: "Let M. Vincent procure this appointment for my son, and I undertake, without any effort on his part or of his Congregation, to regain all the rights and titles of which Saint-Lazare has been deprived. I see clearly how this is to be done. Let M. Vincent have no scruple, nor lose such an opportunity of benefiting his Congregation." When this great inducement was reported to him the saint merely answered: "For all the wealth in the world I will never act contrary to God or my conscience. The Congregation will never perish through poverty; rather, it is the neglect of it that will bring about its ruin." He made a similar reply to a distinguished governor who requested him to do him a service at court, and in return he would support the missionaries whom some influential people were trying to establish in the place. "I will do what I can for you," he said; "but as regards the priests of the mission, I beg of you to leave them to God. I had rather not see them in your city at all, than that they should be there by the authority and favour of men."<sup>1</sup> All such proposals, no matter how tempting, were rejected by his disinterestedness like arrows from off a hard shield.

But what Saint Vincent hoped for, more than anything else, was to reap profit from a position which he had not sought, and in which God had placed him against his inclination, by working as far as in him lay, sweetly and patiently, but with all his zeal, to complete the reform of the clergy of France by nominating worthy bishops. On that everything depended. If the bishops are without vocation, without learning, without virtue, unworthy even of being priests, scandalising their clergy as well as their flocks, what can be expected? If they do not reside in their dioceses, except when they come to collect their revenues, to ornament their estates, and restore their grand palaces, how can the priests be humble, modest, detached, and contented with their poor dwellings? If the bishops are ambitious, ever thinking their sees too small, anxious to raise themselves to archbishoprics and to the cardinalate, and thus always intriguing, will not the priests act likewise and look for good prebends, abbeys and bishoprics? Now all these disorders were prevalent at the time and rendered the reform of the clergy almost impossible.

The first thing that Saint Vincent set about correcting in the Council of Conscience was the nomination of children to episcopal Sees. To be nominated to an abbey, it should be necessary

<sup>1</sup> Maynard, vol. iii. p. 406.



to have completed the eighteenth year; to a priory, or to a canonry in a cathedral church, the sixteenth; and in a collegiate church, the fourteenth. As to bishops, the candidate should be at least one year ordained priest. Alas! these expressions reveal the wounds of the Church of France in the seventeenth century. The evil must have been deep indeed when Saint Vincent asked only so little.

The second point the saint sought to establish was that before bishops were nominated the property of the see should not be made away with. There was a custom of burdening the episcopal revenues with annuities in favour of lords and their sons, so that when the poor bishop came he had not sufficient for necessary expenses and good works. Thus it arose, especially in the provinces, that bishops would not reside in their sees, and came to Paris seeking better places or priories and abbeys to increase their fortunes.

Thirdly, Saint Vincent secured the abolition, or at least the diminution, of what were known as *dévolus*. Some ecclesiastics obtained a patent by which they were permitted to fix their title to a bishopric, abbey, or canonry, of which they would enter into possession, if they could succeed in obtaining the resignation of the legitimate incumbent. Thus they harassed him, ever spying after him, reporting him to the tribunal, and obliging him either to give in or ransom himself by a large sum of money. It was a licence for ambition and espionage.

But what Saint Vincent gained more than anything else was to have it laid down as a principle, that for the future those only should be appointed to bishoprics, abbeys, or canonries, who should possess the qualities required by the Council of Trent, namely, sufficient learning and tried virtue. It was not difficult to have the expediency of this principle admitted; but hard, delicate, and heroic were the struggles necessary to reduce it to practice. The Queen was well inclined, but feeble-minded and completely in the hands of Mazarin. The latter, though a cardinal, was not a priest. He had faith, but it was very elastic. Mazarin, even more than Richelieu, looked at Church matters from a political standpoint. Surrounded by enemies, twice driven from the kingdom, he would stop at nothing in order to win or overcome a great lord. Trafficking in bishoprics and abbeys was of slight account with him. The other two members of the council were excellent. Chancellor Séguier, belonging to the illustrious family of that name, was related to Cardinal de Bérulle and Mme. Acarie; the other was M. Charton, Grand

Penitentiary of Notre-Dame. Saint Vincent was assured of their support when upholding the honour and holiness of the clergy ; but neither of them was able to resist Mazarin. Thus was the saint situated in the Council of Conscience. So long as the episcopal nomination did not interfere with his political or other interests, Mazarin did not mind ; and in this way, during ten years our saint was enabled to make many wise selections. But neither the unworthiness of the candidate nor any other objection could prevent Mazarin when political interests were at stake. However, the saint did not hesitate to speak out, slowly and deliberately, giving reasons for rejecting such and such a person ; and having acted thus, if, notwithstanding, the election took place, he silently submitted. But how it stung so sensitive a soul as his ! He groaned under the burden, and all his correspondence at this period breathes his sorrow. "I shudder," he would say, "when I think that this cursed traffic in bishoprics may draw down the anger of God on the kingdom." And to a superior of his house in Rome he wrote : "I was never more deserving of compassion than I am at present, nor of more prayers than since I entered this new office of mine. I hope it will not last long. Pray for me." And to another of his priests : "I pray to God every day that I may be regarded as a fool, as I am, and be relieved of this office, and have a better opportunity of doing penance for my sins." Again, when it was reported that he was in disgrace at court, he said : "Would to God it were true !" as he lifted his eyes to heaven and struck his breast. "But, wretch that I am, I am not worthy of such a favour." He wrote in the same strain to Father Codoing, superior at Rome, on January 4, 1645 : "God be praised for all you told me. It is true that for a time, it seemed likely that I should be no longer tolerated in this position, but my sins have prevented God from accepting my prayers and sacrifices to rid myself of this office." There is seldom smoke without fire, and as a matter of fact Mazarin was working hard to have Saint Vincent dismissed from the Council of Conscience. It must be said, however, to the honour of Anne of Austria, that the Cardinal could not extort her consent. Then, with his habitual cunning, he began to convoke the council irregularly, not having any appointed day, and as it were by chance not inviting Saint Vincent on the days when he determined to nominate a person to whom the saint had objected.

The Queen was well intentioned, and Saint Vincent, whom

she revered, could confidently rely upon her, but unfortunately Mazarin had the upper hand, and often she signed nominations which her conscience reproved. Worried with the struggle, and not succeeding in winning over our saint, Mazarin resolved to abolish the Council of Conscience altogether. Mme. de Motteville, the faithful friend of Anne of Austria, discreetly reveals the feeble resistance and pain of the Queen. But at that time everything yielded before the will of the imperious minister. "Shortly afterwards," writes Mme. de Motteville, "the Council of Conscience was done away with, because its chief member, M. Vincent, a single-minded man, who did not wish to curry favour at court, was ridiculed on account of his humility, mortification and evangelical simplicity, which were by no means congenial to the vanity, ambition and self-interest that prevailed there. The Queen, who had established the council, was very anxious to retain it, and expressed to him her scruples on the point; but she was weak in this matter, and often yielded to her minister's opinion, not thinking herself as capable as he, nor even as capable as she really was in many things. Thus it was the Cardinal could easily persuade her to do as he wished, and to yield after some resistance to his arguments. I know, however, that, especially in the selection of bishops, the Queen had great difficulty, and the more so when she saw that she had followed Mazarin's advice too readily on this important point. She did not always do this, and never without consulting Saint Vincent, as long as he lived, or others whom she deemed capable of giving advice. She was sometimes deceived by the false virtue of the candidates whom the pious persons sent by her to examine, too easily recommended. However, notwithstanding her minister's indifference on this subject, God granted that this princess should witness most of those elevated during her regency, leading most exemplary lives."<sup>1</sup>

It was not only in the Council of Conscience that Saint Vincent was saddened in witnessing the honour of the Church and the interests of souls so frequently and so readily sacrificed: outside of it he was besieged with solicitations that made him shudder, and often these were accompanied with injuries, threats, calumnies and even blows. A religious highly esteemed in his order for his regularity, and outside of it for his eloquence, wrote to him one day to tell him that owing to his long labours and the austerity of his rule,

<sup>1</sup> *Mémoire de Mme. de Motteville.*

he found his strength failing, and he feared that he should not be able to serve God and the Church much longer. "But," he added, "if the Crown would make me Suffragan to the Archbishop of Rheims, I should, as bishop, be dispensed from fasts and other religious austerities, and might yet preach for many a day with power and good results. I beg you, as my friend, to tell me what you think of this, and if your opinion is favourable, to help me to obtain a nomination from the King, in which I am sure of the support of persons who have credit and influence at court." The saint replied by a letter, in which we recognise among other things a mild and quiet irony. "I do not doubt that your Reverence would do wonders in the episcopate if you were called to it by God; but He has given you such great success in all your works in the place where you are, that there is no reason to suppose that it is His will to remove you. For, if His Providence called you to the episcopate, it is not to yourself that He would apply to place you there. He would rather put it into the hearts of those in whose power it is to appoint persons to ecclesiastical offices and dignities, to make choice of you, without your putting yourself forward, and in that case your vocation would be pure and certain. But to offer yourself could hardly be right, and you could not hope for the blessing of God on such a change, which could neither be desired nor sought after by a soul truly humble, as yours is. And besides, Father, what a wrong you would do to your order by depriving it of one of its principal supports, which sustains and adorns it, both by doctrine and example. If you were to open the door you would give occasion to others to go out, as well as yourself, or at least to grow weary of the practices of penance. They would be sure to find some excuse for lightening and diminishing them, to the injury of your rule. Nature wearies of austerities, and if we consult her, she will say it is too much, that we must spare ourselves in order to live longer and do God more service. Instead of which our Lord says, '*He that loveth his life shall lose it, and he that hateth his life shall save it.*' You know better than I do all that may be said on this subject, and I should not have ventured to write my thoughts about it, if you had not desired me to do so. But forsooth you have not thought enough of the crown which awaits you. O my God how glorious it will be! You have already done so much to win it, and perhaps there remains but little more for you to do. You only need to persevere in the narrow way on which you have entered, which leads to life. You

have already overcome the greatest difficulties ; you must therefore take courage, and hope that God will give you grace to conquer the smaller ones. If you take my advice, you will desist for a time from the labour of preaching, in order to recover your health. You may render many services to God and to your order, which is one of the holiest in the Church of Jesus Christ.”<sup>1</sup>

On another occasion, M. Chavigny, Secretary of State, one of the highest personages at the time, having lost his second son, who enjoyed the revenues of two abbeys, the family came to secure them for the third son, a child of five or six years. Saint Vincent, to whom they applied, decidedly refused. He awaited in patience to receive some remonstrance from M. Chavigny, but was agreeably surprised. “This minister came to see me,” writes Saint Vincent, “and said that, far from being displeased with my firmness, he should have been scandalised if I had acceded—nay, should have despised me and refused the offer.”<sup>2</sup> The true doctrine was beginning to be felt, although Saint Vincent did not always find persons with such Christian sentiments. “You are an old fool,” said a young man who had been frustrated in his design. “You are quite right, sir,” the holy and aged priest replied, at the same time falling on his knees, “and I beg your pardon for provoking you.”

Another time a distinguished lady was endeavouring to obtain a benefice for one of her sons. “Excuse me, madame,” the saint interrupted, “but I have got nothing to do with the matter.” At first dumbfounded at being received less ceremoniously by a poor priest than by the great lords, and then carried away by her pride and passion, she exclaimed “Unquestionably, sir, we can do without you, and accomplish what we want otherwise. Indeed I paid you too much respect in coming to you at all, and it is plain you don’t know how to treat a lady of my rank.” Saint Vincent preserved a profound silence which not even her insults could break. Sometimes an applicant when rejected would even go so far as to strike the saint, which happened in the case of a lord who publicly struck him, because he refused to recommend his son for a bishopric. “You are quite right,” said the saint, as the lord stepped into his carriage, “I am a miserable wretch and a sinner.” But the saint was not satisfied even with this expression of humility, and ran after the carriage and made a most respectful salute.<sup>3</sup> Again,

<sup>1</sup> Maynard, vol. iii. p. 408.

<sup>2</sup> “Letters.”

<sup>3</sup> Maynard, vol. iii. p. 412.

a young man of social standing having petitioned for an abbey, obtained it on condition that Saint Vincent did not oppose him. The young man repaired at once to Saint-Lazare, accompanied by his guardian, who, on behalf of the family, thanked the saint in advance, spoke of the fitness of the candidate for the benefice and of his other good qualities. To all this grand display Saint Vincent, informed beforehand, quietly drew a picture of the very opposite colour, and wound up by a refusal couched in his usual style. "I beg you, sir, to thoroughly understand that I am not going to consent to what God will demand an account." On hearing this the guardian advanced towards him with his clenched hand and poured out a volley of abuse. Seeing that he could not even disturb the saint's serenity he left the room, but Saint Vincent courteously saw him into his carriage.

But the weapon that was most frequently resorted to was calumny, false accusations being brought even to the Queen. "Do you know, M. Vincent," pleasantly remarked the Queen one day, "what is being said of you?"—"Madame," he replied, "I am a great sinner."—"But you ought to defend yourself."—"Many worse things were said against our Saviour and He never defended Himself," replied the saint.

An unworthy ecclesiastic who had lost a benefice, took revenge by spreading a dishonourable story. "If M. Vincent, who cringes to the great, did not advocate my case, it was because I would not pay him. Though such an enemy of simony in others, he practices it himself. I know a person for whom he has just procured a benefice in exchange for his library and a large sum of money." This time the saint was moved, and his first impulse was to write and defend himself. But he had scarcely written two lines when he reproached himself: "O miserable wretch! what I am about? Do I wish to justify myself, when we have just heard that a Christian, falsely accused at Tunis, has endured torture for three days without uttering a single complaint, although he was innocent of the crime laid to his charge? No, it shall not be." And then he tore up the letter.<sup>1</sup>

When neither threats, nor promises, nor calumnies, nor even violence, succeeded, they began to hide from him the efforts that were being made to obtain bishoprics or abbeys, and apply directly to the Queen or the Cardinal, and thus arose the most painful difficulties of all. I shall merely give two most beautiful examples of the saint's conduct. At a time when the court was absent from Paris, Mazarin wrote to Saint Vincent: "Monsieur,

<sup>1</sup> Maynard, vol. iii. p. 405.

—These lines are to inform you that M. N. having sent a despatch here to ask of the Queen for his son the bishopric of N., which has been vacant for some days, she has granted it to him, the more willingly because he has the necessary qualifications for it, and Her Majesty has been very glad of so favourable an opportunity to acknowledge in the person of the son the services of the father and his zeal for the welfare of the State. The Queen promised to write to you herself on the subject, but I have anticipated her, in order that you may take the trouble to see him and give him such instructions and suggestions as you may judge necessary to enable him to discharge satisfactorily the duties of his office. . . .”

Our saint knew well the candidate's unworthiness. No doubt, before God or man he was not responsible for a nomination in which he had taken no part whatever, and might therefore without injury to his conscience passively acquiesce in Mazarin's instructions. But were the honour and welfare of the Church, the needs of an extensive diocese for a long time neglected, to fall into such incapable hands? The man of God sorrowfully looked around him. Every resource was closed as far as the the Queen was concerned, for urged on by Mazarin, she had already signed the royal warrant. To obtain a renunciation from the interested parties was the only alternative. But how hopeless! The saint took a bold step. He went at once to the father of the bishop-elect, an old friend of his, and plainly setting before him the virtues requisite for the episcopate and his son's unfitness, thus concluded: "You are bound to return the warrant that you have received, if you do not wish to expose yourself, your son, and perhaps your whole family, to the indignation of God." The father listened with all the attention which the piety and character of the saint commanded; but the last few words startled him. Frightened by them, he asked for some days to reflect, and the next time the saint came he was received with this exclamation, "O M. Vincent, you have disturbed my rest for several nights!" Then he began to talk of his circumstances and the state of his affairs, his advanced age and the number of his children, and the necessity of providing for them before his death. Alas! the usual excuses with which men strive to close their eyes to duties which are distasteful. Moreover, could not his son have pious and learned ecclesiastics to assist him? In a word, such an opportunity should not be lost. Saint Vincent returned heavy at heart.

At another time the see of Poitiers was vacant. The Duchess of N., a lady-in-waiting to the Queen, set her heart on obtaining it for her son. Well knowing, and with good reason, that Saint Vincent would not enter into her views, she went straight to the Queen and applied for it, representing that the income was but small, but as the family estates lay in Poitou, the desirableness of the position would counterbalance the smallness of the revenue. Anne of Austria promised it, and commanded the Duchess to let Saint Vincent know that she would expect him next day at the usual hour in order to sign the deed.

The Duchess went direct to Saint-Lazare. In order to avoid all explanations, she feigned to be in a great hurry, and delivered the Queen's message in the shortest and most abrupt form. In vain Saint Vincent tried to detain her, and entreated her to allow him a few moments' conversation on the subject of her visit. She would not listen to him, and only repeated that she had nothing to add to Her Majesty's orders.

The next day Saint Vincent appeared at the royal palace with a roll of paper in his hand. "Ah," said the Queen, "it is the nomination to the bishopric of Poitiers which you have brought me to sign," and she took the paper. It was blank. "How is this?" exclaimed the Queen in astonishment. "Have you not prepared the nomination?"—"Pardon me, madame," gently replied the holy man; "but if your Majesty is determined on this choice, I must beg that you will yourself write your appointment, in which in conscience I can take no part."—"How sorry I am, M. Vincent," said the Queen, "that I did not speak to you before I engaged my word. But I have been told that the person in question, though deficient in some respects, is equal to the post. The name decided me. I granted the request at once, fearing that the family might change their mind and not be satisfied with so moderate an income; and indeed I hoped that you would be as well pleased as I was to be let off so cheaply."

At these words, which seemed to show that the Queen took no very special interest in the case, Saint Vincent breathed more freely, for there was room to hope that by appealing to her religious principles he might yet succeed in saving the honour of the episcopate. He therefore answered with respect and deference: "It is true, madame, that, humanly speaking, such a request may appear to your Majesty a very modest one, and that when M. N.'s conduct shall be



worthy of his birth and of his position, he may well aspire to the principal places in your kingdom ; but, unhappily, that time does not seem to have yet arrived." After thus surmounting the obstacles that her tenderness prompted, he continued : "Yesterday I was very anxious to make some respectful observations to the Duchess, in the hope of persuading her, in her piety, to withdraw a request so full of peril to her soul ; but not having been able to make her listen to the truth, it becomes a sacred duty for me to speak without concealment, though with great regret, to your Majesty in the interest both of your honour here and your salvation hereafter."—"I see plainly that advantage has been taken of me," said the Queen with emotion ; "but I have given my word, and you are not the man to advise me to break it."—"Madame, according to all the laws of morals, the revocation of a promise is not only a right, but a duty, where that promise has been extorted on false pretences, and still more in this case where it cannot be fulfilled without a crime."—"Crime, M. Vincent ! Do you mean to tell me then that I have promised to commit a crime ?"—"Certainly not, madame ; your Majesty neither intended nor believed that what you were promising was a crime, consequently your promise was not a crime. But you would indeed commit a crime, and a very great crime, if you were to sacrifice a whole diocese to a false sense of honour, and in my soul and conscience I believe such is the position in which you now stand." Urged on by his zeal, and emboldened at the same time by the disposition in which he found the Queen, he went on to reveal to her the whole truth. "This abbé, madame, whom it has been proposed to you to make a bishop, is most unworthy, and his family are not ignorant of his conduct. They have good reason for wishing to remove him from Paris—but it is not to an episcopal throne that he ought to retire."—"I retract my promise," exclaimed the Queen in alarm, "and I nominate to the see of Poitiers whomsoever you recommend to me. But it must rest with you to make my peace with the Duchess of N., and by repeating to her our conversation, you must not only remove from her mind all thoughts of complaining, but make her see the impossibility of ever speaking of what has passed."

Not a pleasant commission ! But having no longer anything to fear except for himself, Saint Vincent went with a light heart to the Duchess. He desired the brother who always accompanied him to remain in the ante-chamber, while he entered the salon. He was received with great joy, as if he were bringing

the warrant in his pocket. "You came from the Queen?" inquired the Duchess. "Yes, madame, I have just left her Majesty, and I come by her desire to submit to you some observations which I had not the good fortune to be able to lay before you yesterday." Then he related what had passed between him and the Queen. "For the sake of your eternal salvation, madame," he added, "do not take upon yourself for such a son the responsibility inseparable from a bishopric. Seek rather to turn this event to account by recalling him to his duty. Pardon, madame, the liberty I take in speaking thus. The Queen also is deeply distressed at the pain she is giving you, but you would not desire that for your gratification she should sacrifice her soul. She counts on your religious principles, and does not doubt that on reflection you will, after a few days, feel thankful to her, as you certainly will in eternity, that she has withdrawn her promise."

At these words the Duchess, who for some time had been hardly able to restrain herself, rose, and not content with words, she took up a footstool and flung it at the saint. It struck him on the forehead, making a wound from which blood flowed freely. Without a word he wiped it with his handkerchief, and left the room. The brother whom he had left in the ante-chamber heard the noise, and at the sight of Saint Vincent, guessed what had happened. Indignant that his Father, a priest, and the King's minister, should be treated thus, he would have sprung towards the door of the room, but the saint stopped him.

"You have nothing to do there, my brother; this is our way, let us go," and he drew him away. "Is it not a wonderful thing," he added, as they went out, "to see how far a mother's love for her son will carry her?" This was all his revenge.<sup>1</sup>

Noble struggles were those, in which Saint Vincent manifested the highest talent and the most exalted virtue. Gentleness, firmness and the deepest humility were united with the most indomitable energy: patience under injury, gratitude after refusal, and an intrepid zeal for the glory of God, were joined to a respectful submission to royal authority, even when it was misled. "In that man of God," says Fénelon, "shone an incredible discernment of spirits and an exceptional firmness of character. Heedless alike of the favour or the hatred of the great, he looked only to the interests of the Church when in the Council of Conscience he gave his advice for the election of bishops. If the other members of the council had followed more

<sup>1</sup> Maynard, vol. iii: p. 413,

frequently the advice of Saint Vincent, who seemed to divine the future, they would have been far from electing men to bishoprics who afterwards gave the greatest trouble." But if he did not succeed in correcting every abuse and irregularity, he had at least the consolation of seeing the episcopal thrones occupied by holy priests, many of them of his own training, who were to secure the regeneration of the Church of France.

But great as the services were that Saint Vincent rendered in the Council of Conscience by increasing the number of holy bishops, he did something higher still, at least for a time—he established the principle. He inspired the Queen, the Cardinal, the ministers, and the great families with an exalted conception of the true priesthood of Jesus Christ. He restrained trafficking and ecclesiastical bribery. He put simony to shame, and in purifying vocations, laid a foundation for the future. Already he had powerfully contributed to this in establishing preparatory and theological seminaries in the form in which they still exist. He had instituted those retreats for the ordinands and for the clergy, that have now become an annual custom ; and lastly, the Tuesday Conferénces, the prelude and seed of our present ecclesiastical conferences. Thus he completed his work in the Council of Conscience, and ranks among the first of those great men and great saints, who have made the Church of France, and have given her those solid and fruitful institutions that enable her to withstand every revolution and survive every peril.

## BOOK III.

### FORMATION OF THE GREAT ARMIES OF CHARITY.

#### CHAPTER. I.

SAINT VINCENT EMPLOYS LADIES OF THE WORLD  
IN THE SERVICE OF THE POOR

1633—1639

WE must retrace our steps. It is the historian's privilege, and a necessity in a life so complicated as this.

While Saint Vincent de Paul was labouring with such energy and perseverance to reform the French clergy, he was continuing on a larger scale a work that he had already undertaken, namely, the employment of the upper classes in the service of the poor. The profound faith which made him place himself at the service of the poor, made him wish also to see everybody with the same sentiments. He instilled this view into every soul. Against all our sins and failings he saw no more certain remedy than personal and courageous service of the poor. Besides, the circumstances of the time helped to excite this zeal. The poor filled Paris, the large cities and towns, in proportion to which modern society presents no parallel. The religious orders exiled or diminished by Protestantism, hospitals disorganised, and asylums closed—the consequence was that the poor, the young and old, the sick and destitute, all were cast upon the streets. Moreover, their number was yet to be increased at the end of the Thirty Year's War, when famine and pestilence were to destroy the fairest provinces of France: Lorraine, Burgundy, Champagne, Orléanais, and even the environs of Paris, so as to make a nation hitherto so rich, a theatre of misery till then unknown. Finally, to look into the future, for saints are raised up as much for the future as for the present, an epoch was approaching when democracy was about to make an eruption, and sword in hand, to demand its share in public life. To calm this spirit and make it listen to reason, it was necessary to blend with it all that was sweetest, most beneficent and generous in the upper classes. God provides for

the future : for the social misery of the seventeenth century, and for the still more formidable crisis of the eighteenth and nineteenth. He raised up the greatest founder and organiser of charity, Saint Vincent de Paul.

We must not imagine, however, that he had already in deep forethought planned all the organisations which we shall see rise at his suggestion. It was not so. Everything sprang from his ardent, impressionable, tender heart, which could not witness misery without asking how it could be relieved, and from his prudent and resourceful mind, which, at a glance, saw the best and surest remedy.

At the sight, then, of so many poor, so many children, so many young and old destitute in the streets of Paris, and feeling that he was powerless to do anything by himself, he thought of interesting ladies of the world in the work. He turned to them first, because in the domain of charity they are queens. All that earth has of goodness, kindness, tenderness, devotion and self-sacrifice, is in them in an eminent degree. Even the most worldly, the most selfish, is moved at the sight of misery ; and what then, when to the instinct of nature is added the devotion of a soul inflamed with the love of God ? Saint Vincent had already beautiful examples of this at Châtillon, Mâçon, and Joigny. Everywhere ladies had responded to his appeal and worked wonders. Now in a wider theatre and in presence of frightful misery, he had recourse to the like means and with the like success.

Providence, who had prepared His faithful servant to bear assistance to so many in want, was about to bring to his aid generous and devoted women, who were to form the celebrated assembly of the Ladies of Charity, of which we shall subsequently speak.

At present we shall name only a few, merely to give an idea of that admirable movement among the Christian womanhood of the seventeenth century.

In the first rank, both by her social position and the beauty of her soul, is Richelieu's niece, the Duchess d'Aiguillon. Married at sixteen and a widow at eighteen, she endeavoured to bury her grief with her friends the Carmelites, Mlle. de Fontaine and Mme. de la Bréauté, and humbly asked the habit of St. Teresa. But Richelieu, at the summit of his power, was planning for her a royal alliance, and tearing her from the cloister, obtained a brief from the Pope forbidding the young widow, on account of the great good she might effect in the world, to enter religion. Soon

afterwards made, through her uncle's influence, a lady-in-waiting to Mary de Medicis, she appeared at court in a simple costume, without jewellery, but gifted with a beauty and modesty that attracted everybody. The highest noblemen, even princes of royal blood, sought her hand. Richelieu ardently desired a royal alliance ; but that absolute will, that knew no obstacle, was to bend before the resolution of his niece, never to marry, but to consecrate herself entirely to good works. She was then twenty, renowned for her beauty, possessing an immense fortune and the advantage of being the Prime Minister's niece. Richelieu yielded to her invincible determination not to marry again ; but as she manifested anew, and actually carried out her design of entering the Carmelites, he procured a second brief which forbade her, not only for a few years, but for ever, to become a Carmelite. Once more she left Carmel amid sobs and tears. Then taking courage, and supported by her two great directors, Saint Vincent and M. Olier, she returned to the world to devote herself more than ever to good works. She was the angel of her uncle, whose house she managed, appeasing his anger, suggesting good works, and trying to soften his inflexible disposition. After so stormy a life, she obtained for him a peaceful end. She became the right hand of Saint Vincent, placing her purse at his command, and his advocate with Richelieu and the Queen. Living in the Petit-Luxembourg, in the parish of Saint-Sulpice, she obtained from M. Olier a key of the church, and, unknown to others, passed part of her nights prostrate before the tabernacle, where many a time M. Olier found her.

After the Duchess d'Aiguillon comes Mme. Goussault, below her no doubt in rank, but of no less exalted a character, and who, among other honours, may claim that of suggesting to Saint Vincent the idea of the regular assembly of the Ladies of Charity, of which she was the first president. Married to the President of the Court of Exchequer, she was left a widow and mother of five children when still young, rich and beautiful. To the education of her little children she joined the most ardent love of the poor. She was a woman of intellect, prudence and admirable common-sense, whose advice Saint Vincent constantly sought, and to whom, in difficult matters, he always sent Mlle. le Gras, saying, "Find out what Mme. Goussault thinks." She lived with the Sisters of Charity when they were only beginning, and her great regret when dying, in 1639, was, that she did not completely belong to that Company, still so lowly. To her we owe two great and fundamental works—the Assemblies of Charity,

and the reorganisation of the Hôtel-Dieu, of which we will speak later on.

With Mme. Goussault let us associate her friend, no less elevated in mind and disposition, Charlotte de Ligny, Presidente de Herse. A relative of M. Olier, trained under Saint Francis de Sales, who "loved her as his soul," and stood sponsor for one of her children, she possessed the greatest ardour for good works, and recoiled before nothing. She gave Saint Vincent the use of her house at Fréneville, to establish the Association of Charity, which she supported at her own expense. But her principal devotion, derived no doubt from Saint Vincent, was to aid in the sanctification of the clergy. She spared nothing to maintain the exercises of the ordinands at Chartres and in Paris, and afterwards to assist in the foundation of seminaries.

We must not fail to place among this first group a great friend of the Duchess d'Aiguillon, the Marchioness du Vigan, of noble birth and large fortune, which she learned, first from M. de Bérulle, and afterwards from Saint Vincent, to use in the best possible manner. She had two daughters. The one who remained in the world became, thanks to her intimacy with the Duchess d'Aiguillon, the Duchess de Richelieu, and one of the most distinguished and charitable persons of the time. The younger daughter, Marthe du Vigan, spent a singularly troubled youth. She was hardly nineteen when the Duke d'Enghien, the hero of Rocroy, passionately fell in love with her. His contemporaries say, they never witnessed such devotion. When he was leaving for the war it was amidst sobs and tears, and on setting out for the campaign in which he gained the victory of Nordlingden, he even fainted in bidding her adieu. Mlle. de Vigan was touched with such love in so great a man, and although she reciprocated his affection, yet her love was of angelic purity. The Duke had been almost forced into a marriage distasteful to him, and which he laboured hard to dissolve, thinking to at once marry Mlle. du Vigan. Amid his plans, well capable of stirring the enthusiasm of a girl of twenty, who saw the prospect of a royal alliance, Saint Vincent came one day to visit her mother, who was unwell. After the visit the daughter was showing our saint out, when suddenly he turned and said to her, "Mademoiselle, you are not made for this world." The young girl felt her heart saying within her, "If this man was a prophet he would not speak that way." Then, knowing the power he had with God, she trembled to think that he had asked a vocation for her, and besought him not to

do so. The saint smiled, but said nothing. The arrow had struck, and shortly afterwards the fashionable world of the capital learned with admiration that Mlle du Vigeon had buried her beauty, her youth, her hopes and her dreams among the Carmelites, under the name of Sister Martha of Jesus.<sup>1</sup>

Mlle. Pollalion is another grand character. In her tender years, of an extraordinary piety, she had earnestly wished to enter the Capuchins, in the Rue Saint-Honoré. But her parents, on account of her health, made her abandon this idea and marry M. Pollalion, the French consul at Ragusa, who died shortly afterwards in Rome. A widow then at twenty-six, and highly gifted, Mlle. Pollalion hastened to leave the court, which she perfumed with her virtues, and even, as some say, with her miracles, to devote herself to works of charity under the direction of Saint Vincent de Paul. He, after trying her vocation, sent her, with Mlle. le Gras and some other ladies, to visit the Associations of Charity established in the provinces. These two souls seemed made to perfectly understand and complete each other. Mlle. Pollalion, ardent, enterprising, recoiling before no obstacle, equally capable of publicly chastising a woman who was trying to corrupt a young girl, of becoming a servant to gain the obstinate by her sweetness, or of becoming a peasant in order to instruct the ignorant, could not but gain by coming in contact with Mlle. le Gras, who was so wise, so prudent, and so equable. The latter, in turn, by associating with Mlle. Pollalion, learned to crown her energetic character by a confidence and decision which was less natural to her than to her friend. Independently of the services which Mlle. Pollalion rendered as a Lady of Charity, accompanying Mlle. le Gras on her journeys, she had also a special attraction for aiding poor girls, who, from their appearance, poverty, or neglect, were exposed to the most wicked temptations. She sold her carriage and diamonds, devoted herself to the most humble life, and assisted at first by her daughter and son-in-law, Claude Chastelain, Secretary of the Council of State, and later on by Anne of Austria, she founded a large house in the Rue de l'Arbalète. Here she gathered a hundred and eighty young girls, trained teachers for them, and begged on their behalf; but before reaching this heroic degree, she had been initiated into works of charity by Saint Vincent de Paul.

Beside these noble ladies, let us mention, and in the same rank, Mme. de Lamoignon, who at first guided by Saint Francis

<sup>1</sup> Cousin.



de Sales, and later by Saint Vincent, devoted herself so much to charity that she was called the "mother of the poor." When people saw Saint Vincent going towards her house they used to say, "See the father of the poor going to meet the mother of the poor." Made aware of her death, Saint Vincent wished to see her for the last time, and his prayers interrupted by his sobs were a noble tribute to her memory. Happily she left a daughter, who was to equal, if not surpass her in charity.

Then comes Mme. Fouquet, mother of the minister, a noble soul, full of magnanimity and faith. When she heard of her son's disgrace she only said, "I thank you, O my God ; I have ever prayed for my son's salvation, and this is the means."

To this group we must add Mme. de Miramion, who, though coming somewhat later, yet at once took a prominent part. A widow at sixteen, after only six months of a most happy union (1645), she was almost dying of grief when, four and a-half months after her husband's death, she was about to give birth to her child. Having been saved by her faith and strength of mind, and by the love of the child she bore in her womb, she placed herself under the direction of Saint Vincent de Paul, and began a life of extraordinary charity. Clad as a servant, she asked Mlle. le Gras to allow her to accompany her while visiting the poor. But her striking beauty shone through her servant's dress, and the noblest sought her hand. Even the bold and celebrated Bussy-Rabutin became passionately attached to her, but she indignantly rejected him. To avoid such a thing happening again, she conjured Saint Vincent to permit her to become a Nun of the Visitation ; but, despite so many perils, the saint would not consent, for he was desirous of retaining so powerful a help for the growing organisations of charity. As a matter of fact, she became their head. She gathered into her house, near Saint-Nicolas-des-Champs, young orphans, whom she fed and taught. During the famine of 1651 she relieved every day over two thousand. When in 1652 the misery increased, and her income was not sufficient, she sold her necklace of pearls for 24,000 francs, and shortly afterwards disposed of her plate. But where she showed herself still more a true daughter of Saint Vincent de Paul was in her zeal for the clergy. She established at her own expense, in the Hôtel-Dieu, a special ward for old or infirm priests, founded the work of ecclesiastical burses to aid vocations, and at her death bequeathed to it 1,500 livres.

Here we shall merely mention Mlle. le Gras, whom we shall



describe in the following chapter. Becoming a widow at twenty-four, she devoted herself to the service of the poor with such courage, that she did not hesitate to come in contact with the plague-stricken, which evoked such repeated praise from Saint Vincent. "I assure you," he writes to her, when he learned of this act of heroism, "this has so touched my heart that, if it had not been at night, I should have gone at once to see you. But the goodness of God towards those who give themselves to Him for the service of the poor in the Association of Charity, in which no one up to the present has been stricken with the plague, has given me perfect confidence in Him that you shall suffer no evil from it. Would you believe it, I not only visited the sub-prior at Saint-Lazare, who died of the plague, but even felt his breath? And yet, neither those who assisted him nor myself have felt any inconvenience from it. No, do not fear. Our Lord wishes to make use of you for another work which concerns His glory, and I think He will preserve you for it."

A number of other ladies took part in this movement of charity: Mlle. Dufay, of whom Saint Vincent so often speaks with such esteem and regard in his letters; Mlle. du Fresne, the widow of his old friend, on whose virtue the saint relied as upon a rock; Mlle. Violle, and Mmes. de Traversay, de Bullion, de Nicolai, Joly, and Mlle. Cornuel, and a number of others whom it would be impossible to name here. These ladies, even more distinguished by their virtue than by their social position, and often by their wealth, worked together under the guidance of Saint Vincent de Paul, and by the strength of their union gave birth to one of the greatest movements of charity with which history furnishes us.

The assembly of the Ladies of Charity, as it was now called, was not a mere gathering of pious ladies coming together to hear mass and an instruction. It was a work thoroughly organised, with a president, treasurer, and secretary, each voted to office for a term of three years. The ladies rendered an account of the charity disbursed, and reported new cases, and each one had a vote in the matter. Saint Vincent had not wished to be the president or director of this assembly, but merely to come before it as the advocate of the poor. With what respect he treated the ladies! He did nothing without first obtaining their advice. Sometimes he consulted them as to whether Protestants should be embraced in their charity and receive assistance. Marshal Fabert thought so, and Saint

Vincent was inclined towards the same opinion.<sup>1</sup> Sometimes he asked assistance for Lorraine, Rethel, and Saint-Quentin. When about to ask the aid of the assembly for a poor family, he came prepared with his reasons, not wishing that assistance should be given merely on his authority. In his note-book we find such items as: "Learn for the information of the Ladies of Charity if so and so is true;" or again, "whether that man has anything to live on;" or again, "has he children, and how many." While putting forward his own opinion he took that of others, and nothing is so touching as to see the simplicity and promptitude with which he abandoned his own view for that of another. Some of the ladies even reproached him for this. "Why," said one of them to him, "do you not follow your own opinion, which is always the best?"—"Madame," replied the saint, "God forbid that my poor thoughts should prevail over those of others! I am well pleased when God acts without me, who am only a miserable wretch."

How could such a man, speaking in such a tone, be refused! Hence the ladies not only gave immense sums, but collected for him. They became his treasurers, and on one occasion, when particularly moved by his eloquence, they formed a reserve fund upon which he might freely draw. One day the Ladies of Charity, wishing to give him a surprise, presented him, through Mme. de Lamoignon, with 80,000 francs to repair Saint-Lazare. "Oh, no!" said the saint, "this money will be excellently spent on the poor." Another time Mme. de Bullion gave him 80,000 francs for the General Hospital, and he was most profuse in his thanks. The pious Anna-Maria Martinozzi sent him for the poor a piece of work worth 200,000 francs. The saint got Louis XIV., who alone could pay its value, to purchase it. All the gifts, however, were not so valuable, but they came in, in proportion to the misery, and when the crisis had passed away it was calculated that at least nine millions had passed through the hands of the Ladies of Charity.

But these ladies were not content with collecting money and becoming the never-failing support of Saint Vincent, they went in person to see the poor in the Hôtel-Dieu. This is what the saint held in highest esteem. "To send money is good," he said, "but we have not really begun to serve the poor till we visit them." He not only desired that the ladies

<sup>1</sup> Feillet.

should visit the poor, but taught them how to meet them, talk to them, and serve them. He gave the most exquisitely delicate instructions on this point. "When going to visit the poor," he said, "they should leave off their jewels and finery, and be dressed very simply, for the contrast of luxury on the one side, and poverty on the other, makes the condition of the poor all the more painful." They should also avoid all familiarity on the one hand, or stiffness on the other, but treat them openly, respectfully, and as persons of condition, saluting them with the greatest respect. "*I was hungry, and you gave Me to eat ; sick, and you visited Me.*" He sweetly dwelt on these words. "What an honour to visit Jesus Christ, to clothe Him ! If you look only at the poor they shall inspire disgust ; see in them Jesus Christ, and you will be attracted and charmed." The saint loved to point out in detail the marks of profound respect which should be shown to the poor, saying, the men should raise their hats, and the ladies incline before them as before their superiors. That was sufficient in public, but when alone with the poor he wished that they should kneel at their feet and kiss them. Besides, he counselled nothing that he did not practice himself. "When he met the poor he saluted them by raising his hat, and when giving them assistance he still kept it off. Often he embraced them and kissed their feet before giving an alms. In short, he treated them, to use his own words, as "his lords and masters." "Our dear poor and sick are our lords and masters, for our Lord is in them and they in Him." Again, he frequently said, "Take great care of our good lords and masters, the poor country-people." He always invited two beggars to dine with him, and seated them in the places of honour, one on his right and the other on his left. They were helped first, he even served them himself, and as it ordinarily happened that they were old, he had them assisted to the refectory.

When he treated the poor in this way, in what manner did his loving heart speak of them ? The Ladies of Charity were enthralled while listening to him. One day Mme. de Lamoignon, turning to the Duchess de Mantua, said, "Well, may we not say like the disciples on the way to Emmaus, that our hearts are on fire with the love of God while M. Vincent is speaking ? For my part, although I am not very sensitive to spiritual things, I confess my heart is inflamed in listening to him."—"It is not surprising," interrupted Maria de Gonzaque ; "he is an angel of the Lord who bears upon his lips the divine fire which burns

in his heart.”—“That is very true,” added a third, “and it depends upon ourselves to share in the ardours of its love.”<sup>1</sup>

Not only did he wish the Ladies of Charity to visit the poor, he urged them to work with their hands in making dresses for them. They assembled for that end, and each one adopted the pious practice of making dresses for the poor. The Queen of Poland, Maria de Gonzague, remained faithful to this habit. “Our good sisters,” writes Saint Vincent, “were deeply moved when I told them that your Majesty works in this way for the poor. It is without precedent in the Church of God. History, no doubt, tells us of a princess who made her own clothes, but I remember no one who went so far as your Majesty and made clothes for the poor. I believe such conduct is an object of admiration to heaven and of joy to the Church. God be praised for His blessings towards your Majesty, and may He watch over and protect you for many years, that you may edify His Church.”

In the beginning the Ladies of Charity held their meetings in Saint-Lazare. But Saint Vincent, knowing that seed fructifies in proportion as it is more widely scattered, wished that the assemblies should meet successively in different parts of Paris. Hence they were held in Mme. de Lamoignon’s house in the Cour de Palais, in the Duchess d’Aiguillon’s in the Petit-Luxembourg, in Mme. de Herse’s in the Rue Pavée, and in Mme. de Miramion’s in the Rue des Bernardins.

Those ladies had a share in all works of charity, maintaining them, directing them, and sometimes reforming or encouraging them. All, however, not being able to attend to so many works at the same time, they formed themselves into committees to study the different questions, as is done in political assemblies. Thus the great assembly of the Ladies of Charity became by degrees split up into different groups suited to the different charities.

The Ladies of Charity of which we here speak must not be confounded with the Association of Charity. These two societies differ in the date of their origin, organisation, and object. The assembly of the Ladies of Charity was established in 1634, primarily to assist the sick in the Hôtel-Dieu, but soon embraced various other good works. It counted as many as three hundred members, and all of the highest society. It seconded Saint Vincent de Paul in the great works which occupied the last twenty-five years of his life. Its origin was as follows :—

<sup>1</sup> Maynard, vol. iv.

Mme. de Goussault was accustomed to go to the Hôtel-Dieu, where she had a cousin, a nun. In going through the wards she recognised many abuses, or at least defects. Every year about twenty-five thousand persons of every age, sex, country and religion, passed through this institution. What an amount of good could be done here if everything was well organised. In vain had a holy nun, Margaret Bouquet, about twenty years before (1613), tried to inflame by her charity the lukewarmness around her. Soon the disorders crept in again and even increased. Saint Vincent listened attentively to Mme. Goussault, and while acknowledging the state of affairs was very regrettable, and that a great deal of good might be done, yet he felt it was a delicate matter. "God forbid, my daughter," he said, "that I should put my sickle into another man's harvest. The Hôtel-Dieu is governed spiritually and temporally by those whom I regard as very prudent. I have no position nor authority to prevent the irregularities which are to be found there as elsewhere. We must only hope that those whose duty it is, will apply the necessary remedies." Saint Vincent's arguments were golden, but those do not always prevail with ladies. There were abuses to be suppressed and good to be done, so the sensitiveness and timidity of the saint were to be disregarded. Having urged and urged him, and seeing that she could not gain her point, Mme. Goussault went to the Archbishop of Paris, and obtained from him, in 1634, a letter in which he told Saint Vincent that he would be pleased, he should co-operate in Mme. Goussault's design.

On receiving this intimation the saint no longer doubted of the will of God, and without further deliberation or delay, assembled some ladies of rank and piety in Mme. Goussault's house. Among those who came were Mmes. de Ville-Savin, de Bailleul, de Mecq, de Saintot, de Pollalion, and they at once organised the work. The second meeting was even better attended. At it might be seen Mme. Elizabeth d'Aligre, wife of the Chancellor, Anne Petau, and Marie Fouquet, mother of the Minister of Finance. It was arranged that henceforth the Ladies of Charity should go every day in parties of four to visit the poor in the Hôtel-Dieu. They asked the saint to give them some rules for conducting themselves, and as usual he gave them some exquisitely delicate instructions. On arriving at the Hôtel Dieu they were to present themselves to the sisters and humbly ask permission to assist them in their work. A refusal would by no means be given to Mme. Goussault, Mme. Lamoignon,

and Queen Maria de Gonzague ; on the contrary, they would be received with the greatest respect and honour. Thus the Ladies of Charity entered the Hôtel-Dieu, and rooting out bad customs, substituted those based on the highest motives of faith, and in this way worked a reform. In the very first year of their labours more than seven hundred and sixty conversions took place. The business people of Paris even asked to be admitted, and paid their expenses to enjoy the care of the Ladies of Charity.

While Mme. Goussault was occupied with the Hôtel-Dieu, another committee was formed, under the presidency of Mme. de Lamoignon, to look after prisoners. The first class that they came in contact with was that of prisoners for debt—wretched persons who satisfied their creditors with their liberty. The ladies went to see them, investigated their cases, made them acknowledge their faults, consoled and encouraged them, and often opened the doors of the prison by paying their debts. A considerable sum was given annually by the court to the ladies' association for their good work. After seeing to those imprisoned for debt, they naturally passed on to the other prisoners. Saint Vincent wished that they should extend their charity to the galley-slaves, for whom M. Cornuel had left a large grant. "I am expecting M. Cornuel's daughter," wrote Saint Vincent. "Her father has left an annuity of 6000 livres for the assistance of the outcasts." The Duchess d'Aiguillon added to this almost 1500 a year, and thus the care of all classes of prisoners became one of the most flourishing works of the Ladies of Charity.

Other works absorbed the labours and resources of these ladies, such as Mlle. de Pollalion's young girls, the hospice for the aged, the daughters of the Madeline, but, above all, the foundlings. Nothing has placed a brighter jewel in the crown of Saint Vincent, yet nothing has cost him more courage, more devotedness and more sacrifices, than the foundlings.

What is more beautiful than a child? Yet, before Jesus Christ, what was there more abandoned, or even more harshly treated? If delicate and helpless, it was rudely cast away. Even in the seventeenth century the sweet influences of Christianity had not yet overcome such infamous conduct. One evening as Saint Vincent was returning from a mission, he found a beggar lying against the wall. This wretched creature was engaged in maiming an infant, in order the better to excite compassion when he went to beg. Seized with horror, the saint ran up to him,

saying, "Ah! savage, you have deceived me; at a distance I mistook you for a man." Then taking the little victim in his arms, he went to the Rue Saint-Laindry.<sup>1</sup> Here was what was known as the "Couche," to which foundlings were brought. It was a poor house, badly organised, and kept by a widow and two servants. According to official reports three or four hundred children were admitted here every year. Our saint, touched at what he saw, assembled the Ladies of Charity and revealed everything. A committee was formed to visit the Couche and investigate its miseries. The children were trafficked with in a disgraceful manner. They were sold or abandoned at the least inconvenience, and what was a dishonour to Christians, they were allowed to die without baptism. Saint Vincent yearned to take over all, but how could he do it? A dozen or so were taken by lot, and a kind of inspection of the others was established. The ladies saw that they were baptized, that they were attended to, and had a daily roll-call to prevent any trafficking.

Saint Vincent felt by degrees that the practice of drawing a dozen by lot was becoming more and more objectionable, when at least there were three or four hundred brought in every year. Why not adopt all? No doubt the number was large, but what matter, the Sacred Heart is larger still. He turned to the Ladies of Charity, and urged them so forcibly, that they readily undertook the care of all the infants. It was more than they were able. But Saint Vincent was determined to use every resource to aid them, going to the Queen, to the King, and the great lords for assistance. The Queen contributed a large amount, and the King gave an annuity of 8000 francs. The other noblemen raised this sum to 40,000, yet even so much was insufficient to support the number of foundlings that were received.

Under ordinary circumstances they would have had enough, but the misery of Lorraine, Champagne, Burgundy, and the wars of the Froude had rendered uncertain these annuities. The Ladies of Charity declared with sorrow that the expense was beyond their power, and that it was necessary to abandon the work.

Saint Vincent, fearing lest so necessary an institution should be a failure, made new and heroic efforts to sustain it. He sent into the provinces the most zealous and skilful of the members to collect, and when the funds came to an end,

<sup>1</sup> Maynard, vol. iii.



convoked a larger meeting of the ladies than he had held before, in order to make a last effort.

When the ladies had assembled, the saint proposed the question : Is the work to be continued or given up ? " You are free, ladies," said he. " You contracted no obligation, and may withdraw at once. But before taking any resolution, reflect seriously on what you have been doing and on what you are about to do. Through your charity a very large number of children have been preserved, who otherwise should have perished for time and eternity. These innocent creatures, while learning to speak, have learned to know and love God. Some have grown up and are no longer a burden to you. Does not so successful a beginning presage a happy future ? "

As he continued, the saint's heart expanded, till the fire of his charity broke out in his famous peroration : " Yes, ladies, compassion and charity have led you to adopt these little creatures for your children ; you became their mothers by grace, when their mothers by nature abandoned them ; see now whether you too will forsake them. Cease to be their mothers, to become for the moment their judges ; their life and death are in your hands. I await your decision. The time has come for you to pronounce sentence, and to declare whether or not you will still have pity on them. If you continue your charitable care over them they will live ; if you abandon them they will undoubtedly perish. Your own experience forbids you to doubt it."

The assembly was moved to tears, and with one voice exclaimed that the work was to be continued.

As a matter of fact it was continued. Sustained by Saint Vincent, aided by new letters-patent from the King, the work of the foundlings traversed the eighteenth century, triumphantly entered the nineteenth, and even to-day sheds an aureola of glory round Saint Vincent de Paul, religion and the Church, before which must bow in reverence and gratitude every man who has a heart.

The Association of Charity, of which we spoke in Chapter V. of Book I., was extending more and more every day. It was not long till it reached Paris, and produced there similar fruit to that in the provinces. In 1629 the work was established in the parish of Saint-Sauveur, then in Saint-Nicolas-du-Char-donnet, and in almost all the parishes of the capital. As time went on, however, relaxation crept into the assemblies, and the

<sup>1</sup> Maynard vol. iii.

rules were not always observed. To reform them and rekindle their first fervour, Saint Vincent sent from time to time some zealous ladies to visit the assemblies, and to add fuel to the fire of their charity. The person most frequently entrusted with this duty was Mlle. le Gras. In 1629, with Saint Vincent's blessing, she started for Champagne, and went to Montmirail and the neighbouring towns. Bringing with her clothing, a medicine chest, and some money, she was accustomed first to go to the church, pay her respects to the curé, ask his blessing and get the necessary instructions. Next she convoked a meeting of the association if there was one, or if not, she tried to establish it. She brought together the young girls, spoke to them of charity towards the poor, stirred up their enthusiasm, and determined them to place themselves at their service. In 1630 she visited Saint-Cloud, Villepreux, Villiers-le-Bel, Liancourt, Bulle, and went even to Beauvais, where she found that the Bishop had already established eighteen assemblies of charity. At this sight she could not restrain her joy, and spoke with such ardour that even men concealed themselves in order to listen. On her departure the people went a part of the way with her, and were most profuse in their thanks. After this journey she stopped for a short time in Paris, and went on to Senlis, Verneuil, then to Gournay, Neufville-le-Roy, and a second time to Bulle. Everywhere she revised the accounts, saw the number of families visited, how the funds were invested, the number of sheep, and finally noted the names. Towards the end of 1631 she again set out for Champagne, but was there unexpectedly interrupted by the Bishop of Châlons, a holy man, but not in favour of what seemed to him a novelty, and for this reason he asked her to return to Paris. "If his lordship wishes to see you," writes Saint Vincent, "go and explain to him with all simplicity what you are doing. Offer to retrench anything which he desires, or to cease altogether if it pleases him. That is the spirit of God." The Bishop having persevered in his objection, Saint Vincent wrote to Mlle. le Gras to return at once to Paris. "How happy you are," he wrote to console her, "in being, like the Son of God, obliged to withdraw from a province where, thanks be to God, you were doing no evil! Imitate Saint Louis in the tranquillity with which he returned from the Holy Land without having accomplished his design. Perhaps you shall never have a better sacrifice to offer to God."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Vie de Mlle. le Gras.*

Similar journeys were made by Mlle. de Pollalion, Mlle. du Fresne, and Mlle. Violle. Mme. Goussault wished to visit the district around Orleans and Anjou. Before her departure, Saint Vincent asked her to send him a detailed account of her journey, and this precious document reveals in what a spirit of zeal and charity these ladies laboured throughout France in the seventeenth century. Accompanied by some young ladies, and attended by two of her servants, Mme. Goussault set out from Paris. When they started in the carriage they recited the *Itinerarium* and spent some time in prayer. Then they beguiled the length of the journey by pious reading, holy conversation and hymns. After dinner they recited the rosary and the litany of the Blessed Virgin. On arriving in a village they saluted its guardian angel, and if they stopped there, their first visit was to the church, and their second to the hospice, if there was one. Their motto was, "God and the poor," always and everywhere.

At Etréchy, Mme. Goussault entertained herself while dining with some little children whom she felt were the chosen ones of God. "I had great joy," she said, "in teaching them the Our Father, and it made me forget the sadness I felt on leaving this morning."

At Étampes, while her servant was buying some things for the sick, Mme. Goussault entertained the young superioress of the Hôtel-Dieu with her conversation. "I was dressed as a servant," she writes, "and she said to me, 'Who are you? Are you married? I have often heard of Mlle. Acarie, and I think you are another like her.'" In the same way she discoursed with the hostess that evening after supper.

The next day at Angerville, not having a hospice to visit, she went to the church, and finding there some children, taught them to make the sign of the cross.

At Arthenay she taught catechism. At Orleans she visited the Hôtel-Dieu, rich indeed, but in consequence of the insufficient number of the religious, the sick were left to the care of servants. She intended to stop a few days, but was so displeased at having to lodge with Huguenots that she left at once.

At Blois she found plenty of devotion, but the Hôtel-Dieu not visited and badly organised. The Jesuits exhorted the ladies to visit the sick, but, as one of her cousins remarked, "Providence left it to her to show how ladies of the upper classes in Paris were performing these charitable works." Thus she spent the whole journey, seeking God alone in works of

charity, and never stopping to gratify curiosity or take any pleasure.

On her arrival at Angers she was met by two gentlemen, who insisted on preventing her going at once to visit the Hôtel-Dieu, and forced her to submit to a grand reception. The next day the principal persons of the place waited on her, and she had scarcely time to assume her humble costume before visiting the hospital. She found everything there well ordered. While at Angers, in obedience to the words of our Lord in the Gospel, "*I was a prisoner,*" she visited the prisons, and distributed alms, pictures and rosaries. "What displeases me here," she says, "is that everything becomes known and talked too much about."

When teaching the catechism in presence of some young ladies in order to show them how it should be done, one of them said: "It is evident how much you love the poor, and that you are delighted to be among them. You seem doubly charming while you are speaking to them." A priest told her that he felt himself happy in simply listening to her. "Now, Father," this humble soul hastens to add in her letter, "it is for your sake I write, that you may praise and thank God. Ask Him to destroy my pride by whatever means He wishes, for I am ready to lose and leave all things, preferring humility to any and every consolation."

"The young ladies came to be instructed by her. 'If you were here for a year,' said one of them, 'you would convert the whole town.' What was most attractive in Mme. Goussault was the manner in which she united simplicity and affability with virtue. She did pose as a reformer, but lived simply and uprightly. She thoroughly enjoyed an hour at backgammon, for she always condescended in what was not sinful. Hence she had only one regret after her stay at Angers, and that was that she had refused to allow her portrait to be taken. 'It is the custom,' she writes; 'everybody does it, and after death it is placed in the church near the tomb. Now I refused to have mine taken, and I am sorry, for it seems to me to have been false humility, and condescension would have been better.'"<sup>1</sup>

Can anything be more beautiful than those great ladies employing their lives in this way? For thirty or forty leagues round Paris, beyond the Loire, into the heart of Champagne, and to the borders of Burgundy, they were everywhere reviving charitable

<sup>1</sup> Maynard, vol. iii.

works, and by their words, but still more by their deeds, enkindling in souls a love for the poor.

Suddenly this great movement of charity received its crowning success. The Queen, hearing of all the good done in Paris and elsewhere by the Ladies of Charity, wished to institute an assembly composed of ladies of the court, and of which she herself might be president. She asked Saint Vincent to draw up the rules, and we cannot but be struck with admiration in reading them :—

“This assembly shall be composed of Her Majesty the Queen, and a few others whom it may please Her Majesty to select. They shall assist the Ladies of Charity who visit the Hôtel-Dieu, the foundlings, the outcasts, Mlle. Pollalion’s little orphans, the poor girls of the parish, those of the Madeleine ; in a word, all similar undertakings.

“They shall go in parties of three to inspect each of these charities, finding out the necessities of each, in order to have assistance given to them. This shall be their duty for a year, when they shall change the departments of which they had charge. But Her Majesty shall always remain president of the assembly.

“Those ladies shall study to acquire Christian perfection suitable to their state, spend half-an-hour in meditation and hear mass daily. They shall read a chapter from the *Introduction to a Devout Life* or *The Love of God*, make an examination of conscience every day, and confess and communicate at least each week.

“They shall assemble by order of Her Majesty every first Friday of the month, and spend half-an-hour in conversing on the virtues suitable to their state. Next, they shall report the cases of want and the difficulties which each one discovered in the department over which she presided. Her Majesty, having heard the report and taken the opinion of the ladies, shall command what seems best.

“It shall be a maxim among them not to treat, while at the assembly, of other topics, especially those concerning the State. They shall not take occasion at their meetings to forward their own interests, but honour and love Her Majesty, and entertain a mutual affection for one another. They shall assist and console one another, and communicate for sick and deceased members. Finally, they shall honour the silence of our Divine Lord in all that regards their assembly, for Satan frustrates holy enterprises that are divulged.’

Behold then the highest nobility of France, even the Queen, at the feet of the poor. See the great ladies of Paris and the provinces giving all their influence, their devotion, their fortune, and their very service to the sick, to foundlings, to prisoners and outcasts, consoling their sorrow, healing their wounds, and by their heroic example reviving the ministry of charity confided to Christian womanhood. "For more than eight hundred years," says Saint Vincent de Paul, "women have had no public employment in the Church. See here how Providence calls on you, ladies, to supply this want." And again: "The maintenance and instruction of the poor at the Hôtel-Dieu, the nursing and rearing of foundlings, the care of providing for the spiritual and temporal wants of criminals condemned to the galleys, the assistance given to the desolated frontiers and provinces, the contributions to the missions of the East, North, and South; these are the labours of your association, ladies. What! ladies did all this! Yes, this is what for twenty years God has given you the grace to undertake and accomplish." Again, Mlle. le Gras, whose voice is the echo of Saint Vincent's, says: "It is evident that, in our age, Divine Providence desires to make use of our sex, to show men that it is He alone who wishes to help the afflicted and to give them powerful aids to salvation. Has it not been by this light that the ladies of the Company have recognised the needs of the poor, and that God has given them grace to help them so charitably and so heroically, that Paris has become the admiration and example of the whole kingdom?"

But let us continue, we have yet to contemplate greater wonders.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE SISTERS OF CHARITY.

1633-1642.

THERE are few religious Congregations in modern times that have done greater honour to the Catholic Church, or won more sympathy for themselves, than the Sisters of Charity. Yet there is no institution whose future was less foreseen, even by its very founders. "O God !" says St. Vincent de Paul, "how can it be said that I founded the Sisters of Charity ? I did not even think of it, nor Mlle. le Gras." In the beginning this Congregation was composed of some country girls, without much education, and employed merely as auxiliaries of the Ladies of Charity. No other end was then in view. We are now about to see with what care Saint Vincent trained them, and how he formed these extraordinary women, destined by God for the great crisis of modern times, uniting as they do the purity of virgins with the devotedness of mothers.

As long as the Association of Charity was established in the country, those who belonged to it were usually of the middle class, and they attended the sick in a manner that left nothing to be desired. It was not so in Paris, where the ladies of society could not always suit themselves to meet the wants of the poor. Experience soon showed that something was wanting. Some of the members were too distinguished to visit the poor and sick, and they sent their servants. But of what value were their services ? Others were prevented by their husbands, and when the plague broke out, were absolutely compelled to remain at home. Besides, if among the ladies of the association there were heroines of charity, on the other hand others were not so reliable, and could not always be counted on. Saint Vincent saw the work was not progressing, and that soon it should give way if the ladies were not assisted by some young girls of humble condition, who would adapt themselves to the circumstances. The towns and villages supplied plenty of modest, generous-hearted girls, who, not anxious to marry, yet never thinking of entering religion, were capable of tending the sick and of co-operating in a good

work, even more than ladies of quality. Nobody had met more of that class than Saint Vincent, while giving missions through the country, and these, he thought, might become assistants of the Ladies of Charity.

Soon a certain number were allotted to the different parishes in Paris, two in Saint-Sulpice, one in Saint-Nicolas, one in Saint-Laurent and Saint-Sauveur. They lodged with the Ladies of Charity, and during the week visited the poor and sick, and then reported the cases of destitution or want. On Sundays they assembled in Saint-Lazare and were lectured on their duties. In the beginning they were known simply by their baptismal names. Thus Saint Vincent writes, "As to Marguerite, it will be well to take care of her." Later on the name of the parish was added ; for example Marguerite of Saint-Paul, Marie of Saint-Laurent. Often Saint Vincent even suppressed the baptismal name, as here, "The ladies complain about her of Saint-Merry." By degrees, however, we notice in the saint's letters such expressions as this, "Can not our Sister Louise come?"

Many of those girls who presented themselves were rather rough. "Yesterday," writes Saint Vincent, "one came who seemed very uncouth. I have not inquired if the one from Ardennes can read or sew ; I very much doubt whether she will be satisfactory." But if there were some plain and blunt, like the emerald before it is chiselled, there were heroines too. One of these, the first to arrive, seems to have been chosen by God to be the type or form of the future community. This was Marguerite Nazeau, a poor shepherdess that had been guarding her flock. How was it that she deemed it so important to be able to read and write ? Her whole thought was of being able to teach her little companions, and for that end she bought a book which she laboured at while minding her flock. When not able to understand something in it, she stopped some one that was passing and asked for an explanation. In this way she made progress and began to teach little children, till soon her own village was not sufficient for her zeal; and accompanied by two or three of her pupils, she went from village to village instructing the ignorant, though despised and ridiculed by the people. Notwithstanding she was often in want of everything, yet by economy she found means of aiding towards the education of young students for the priesthood. During one of her journeys she met Saint Vincent, and immediately her virtues expanded. Such was her amiability that



she was beloved in the parishes of Saint-Benoit, Saint-Sauveur, and Saint-Nicolas-des-Champs. Her love of the poor was so great that no fatigue wearied her, and it may be said that she died of self-sacrifice. Meeting with a poor woman stricken with the plague, she took her home to her humble lodging, and while attending to her, fell a victim herself, leaving to all those who came after her a striking example of what a Sister of Charity should be.

It is easier, perhaps, to die through devotedness, as many of Marguerite Nazeau's companions were capable of doing, than to be constantly recollected, amiable and edifying. It is easier to meet death at a single stroke than to root out all our defects one by one. The Ladies of Charity complained of the education of some, while many, even the best, fresh from their country life, had no idea of meditation or exercises of piety. For the most part isolated as they were, placed away from each other in the different parishes of Paris, without any bond of union, if it happened that one did not succeed, there was scarcely any authority to correct her and to transfer her to another house. This state of things could not last. Saint Vincent felt the absolute necessity of some kind of novitiate, in which they might be trained before serving the poor. To accomplish this, however, a house and a directress should be found.

The house was soon found ; but as to the directress, for a long time Saint Vincent hesitated in his choice. At last he chose Mlle. le Gras, already known to the reader, but with whom it is now necessary to be more fully acquainted.

Mlle. le Gras, did not belong to the nobility properly so called. She had therefore no right to be styled Madame. Even when married or as a widow she was only to be addressed as Mademoiselle, like Mlle. du Fay or Mlle. Pollalion. She came of an influential family which by reason of its services and patriotism was in close contact with the nobility. On her father's side she was a Marillac, an old and esteemed family of Auvergne, which gave France just then Marshal Louis de Marillac, and Michel de Marillac, Keeper of the Seals. Both these reached the highest honours, only to be deprived of them in so tragic a manner. By her mother she was a Camus, niece, it has erroneously been said, of Mgr. Camus, Bishop of Belley, and the friend of Saint Francis de Sales. She was his penitent, however, and for a long time directed by him. Bereft of her mother in her tender years, and soon afterwards of her father, she was confided to her aunt,

a nun in the convent of Poissy, and even thus early manifested striking piety. Two traits of this piety deserve notice as being parts of the mysterious and providential preparation of her soul for the great mission destined to be entrusted to her. Called by God to form these heroic women whom He was preparing for the social crisis of modern times, and destined to unite the purity of virgins with the passionate devotedness of mothers, she experienced successively all that was greatest in the two states. When eighteen, inflamed with a love of holy virginity, poverty, and humility, she left Poissy, which she thought too rich for her. Not even content with the fervent Carmelites, she was attracted by the poor Capuchins, who were attracting all in Paris by the austerity and poverty which they practised. Here she would have satiated her love of mortification, but the prudent superior, Father Champigny, advised her to withdraw on account of the feebleness of her health. He regretted losing such a holy soul, but felt that God had great designs in store for her.

In the beginning it was not easy to see these designs. Now that her health had excluded her from religion, her family urged her to marry, which she did on 5th February, 1613, at the age of twenty-one. Her husband was Antoine le Gras, Under-Secretary of Mary de Medicis, a young man of good family and solid piety, whom death snatched away when but a few years married, thus leaving Mlle. le Gras a widow and mother of a child in arms. Here it is that the design of Providence unfolds itself. She, who at one time cherished above all things, holy virginity, became a mother, as if God had wished that she should pass through these two states, in order that she might more deeply imprint upon the hearts of her spiritual daughters a love of virginal purity with maternal tenderness.

Saint Vincent, under whose direction we find her from 1626, at first seemed to be principally concerned with restraining her excessive tenderness, disquietude, and motherly solicitude which was too anxious to be spiritual. "As regards your son," he writes, "I shall see him ; but be tranquil, I beg of you, since you may feel assured he has the Divine protection, and nothing will injure him. But what must be said of this excessive tenderness ? Undoubtedly you must labour to overcome it, as it will injure your spirit of devotion, and rob you of that calm which God so much loves."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Letters," vol. i. p. 26.

And again : "I never saw a mother like you. In the name of God, abandon your child to the care of his heavenly Father, who loves him far more than you do ; or at least restrain your over-anxiety." <sup>1</sup> Again : "Oh ! how happy it is to be a child of God, who loves his children far more than you do, although you have the greatest affection I have ever seen in a mother. I saw your child yesterday, and I love him more than I can tell you. I do not wish you to yield to that excessively tender affection which is against reason, and consequently against God, who desires that mothers should do their duty towards their children, but not sacrifice everything for their sake. We shall discuss this as soon as we meet after the feast." <sup>2</sup> Mlle. le Gras earnestly wished that her dear child should one day become a priest, and he was only thirteen when she began to turn his thoughts in that direction. Saint Vincent merely listened, and tried to restrain her. "Leave him alone," he wrote, "and abandon him entirely to the will of God, for it belongs to Him alone to guide such young and tender souls. He has a deeper interest in him than you. When I shall have time to see you or to write, I shall repeat to you what I said one day to Mme. de Chantal on this very subject. It consoled and relieved her, through the mercy of God, of a trial similar to yours." <sup>3</sup> Mlle. le Gras still persisted ; but alas ! which of us realises his early dreams ? The older the boy became, the less evident his vocation became. He was pious, but did not wish to be a priest. Saint Vincent seeing this, told it to his mother in the following words : "In reply to your letter, I must inform you that your son has told M. de la Salle that he would only become an ecclesiastic to please you ; that he has wished himself dead, but to please you he would take minor orders. Now is this a true vocation ? I think he would rather die than wish your death. However this may be, whether his wish be from nature or from Satan, his will is not sufficiently free to decide a point of such importance. Some time ago a youth received the sub-diaconate in the same spirit, and the consequence was he could not be elevated to the other orders. Do you wish to expose your son to a like danger ? Leave him to God, who is more his Father, than you are his mother, and loves him more than you do. He will call him when He thinks fit, or place him in a state suitable to attain his salvation. I remember a suspended priest who was ordained when his mind was in trouble and doubt, God only knows where he is now. Leave all to God, and resign your will to His.

<sup>1</sup> "Letters," vol. i. p. 84.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* p. 145.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* p. 23.

Meditate on our Lord's answer to Zebedee : '*You know not what you ask.*'"<sup>1</sup> After this Mlle. le Gras restrained her eagerness and abandoned the great wish of her life. Her son became a parliamentary lawyer, and marrying Mlle. le Clerc in 1650, continued to lead a most exemplary Christian life.

The ardour which Mlle. le Gras showed with regard to her son manifested itself in everything else. She had a fire of charity in her heart, which the least prospect of doing good fanned, and which might have injured her, were she not constantly restrained and admonished by her holy director to be peaceful and resigned. "In the name of God, love your own helplessness and remain tranquil. This is the highest honour that you can at present pay our Lord, who is tranquillity itself. Oh ! our Lord did well not to select you for His mother, since you cannot honour Him by tranquillity under trying circumstances. Honour, I beg of you, the calm of our Saviour's soul, by a perfect resignation to His holy will."<sup>2</sup> Another day he wrote : "I beg of you to honour the interior desolation of the saints, and especially the Saint of saints, and their closer union with God afterwards. I must say I will blame you to-morrow for yielding to these vain and frivolous fears. Learn to be patient."<sup>3</sup>

This ardent soul was united to an exquisitely sensitive and delicate body. Her constitution was naturally weak. "You are almost like Mlle. le Gras," writes Saint Vincent to a sick priest, "whom I look upon as practically dead for the last ten years. To look at her one would think she came from the tomb, she seems so weak and pale, but God only knows the strength of her mind. Not long ago she made a journey of a hundred leagues, and were it not for her frequent illnesses and the respect she has for obedience, she would often go here and there to visit the sisters and help them."<sup>4</sup>

Usually such activity of mind leads to precipitation and want of reflection. It was not so with Mlle. le Gras. She had a quick perception, and yet her mind was well balanced. She was especially strong-minded, and her resolution was prompt and not to be recalled. She spoke so charmingly of God and spiritual things, that men concealed themselves in order to listen to her instructions to the sisters. As it often happens, her mind, full of darkness in regard to herself, had great light in discerning the interior of others. She revealed souls

<sup>1</sup> "Letters," vol. i. p. 246.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* p. 161.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* p. 442.

<sup>4</sup> "Letters," vol. ii. p. 64.

to themselves, and they always left her in peace and comfort.

Her only defect as directress and superioress might have been an aspect of severity, seriousness, or even sadness, which at first sight might make her seem difficult of approach. Saint Vincent looked to this point. "Be careful of your health," he writes, "and honour the serenity of the Sacred Heart. Oh ! how I desire this. Now, you must do all you can on your side. Be cheerful, and do what you have to do with a bright spirit." Another day when she was suffering and speaking of her death, he said : "O Jesus ! the time has not yet come. In the name of God, do everything you can to improve, and treat yourself better. If I can, I shall go over to see you this evening ; if not, to-morrow, with the help of God. Keep up your spirits in the name of God." It was always the same expression : "Rejoice in the Lord" ; words which are the consolation of all valiant souls, smothering the grief of this world, and making us joyous in the Lord.

Saint Vincent was not slow to recognise the treasure God had sent him, and he cultivated it like a master. He wrote to her almost daily, and heard her confession weekly. He never left Paris without going to see her, or excusing himself if he could not do so. He directed her retreats and gave her the subjects of her meditations. He took her advice on all matters, and in such an humble and respectful manner, that no sign of superiority, much less of familiarity, appeared, leaving us an inimitable and lasting model of a correspondence between a director and his penitents.

With such material and such a directress we might expect wonders. Saint Vincent wished to begin at once. He went himself to select a house, and chose a very small one in a poor quarter of Paris. This house, which was the cradle of the Sisters of Charity, is still to be seen. Formerly the street was known as Rue des Fossés Saint-Victor, but now as Rue du Cardinal-Lemoine. The house has two small windows in front, a low door and a dark hall. Here Mlle. le Gras entered on November 29, 1633, with four or five sisters carefully selected by Saint Vincent. Notwithstanding the obscurity which surrounds their beginning, and the exact names of those four or five sisters, yet, we may judge of their virtue from the enthusiasm of Mlle. le Gras. Four months had not elapsed before she asked Saint Vincent's permission to bind herself by vow to so holy a work. The saint granted her request, and

she thus consecrated herself on March 25, 1634, a day which will remain ever memorable with the Sisters of Charity, and on which every year they renew their vows.

The house being now secured, and the number of postulants increasing, Saint Vincent felt it was time to establish a regular religious training. With this end in view he went every week with M. Portail, or some other confrère, to the humble house in the Rue du Cardinal-Lemoine, and delivered a conference on the virtues necessary for a Sister of Charity. He began with the *Veni Sancte*, and then pointed out the subject of the conference, on which the sisters, informed beforehand, had made their prayer. He asked some of them questions, such as, "Tell us, sister, what reason we have for practising such and such a virtue?" When one sister had finished he asked another, "And you, sister, near the window, have you any other reason to add?" and so on. Saint Vincent listened in this way to ten or fifteen of the sisters giving free expression to their thoughts, and often he commended them, saying, "Oh, how true, my daughter; what a beautiful reason you have adduced! God be praised." Frequently he brought the conference to a close by addressing Mlle. le Gras: "And you, mademoiselle, can you add anything further?" Lastly, the saint reviewed what had been said, dwelling on the important points, and concluded with some practical resolution.

Nothing is so simple, stirring and penetrating as these conferences. It is a father speaking open-heartedly to his children. No searching after effect, no attempt at style, but a simple outpouring of a heart all on fire with charity, radiating darts of the love of God, and uniting self-abasement with a profound knowledge of human nature. The conferences were taken down by Mlle. le Gras or one of the sisters, and are still preserved.<sup>1</sup>

We feel we must give some extracts, but how can we select from these two volumes of over a thousand pages, every one of which breathes the spirit of Saint Vincent? A subject upon which the saint loved especially to dwell was their obscure origin.

"A community like yours, destined to so holy and noble an object, so agreeable to our Divine Saviour, and so useful to our neighbour, could certainly have no other author but God Himself; for until its commencement had anyone ever heard of such a work? Why has God done this? He did it to serve the poor. We have seen, it is true, religious and hospitals for the assistance of the sick; but before your

<sup>1</sup> *Conferences de Saint Vincent de Paul aux Filles de la Charité*, 2 vols

establishment there was never a community destined to go and serve the sick in their houses. If, in some poor family, any one fell sick, he was sent to the hospital, and this separated the husband from his wife, and the children from their parents. Until now, O my God! you had not furnished the means of going to assist them in their houses, and it seemed in a manner as if Thy adorable providence, which never fails, did not extend its watchful care over them. Why, think you, my dear sisters, did God delay in granting this assistance to them? Oh! because it was to be reserved to you; yes, as our sister has very well remarked, you were destined from all eternity for this work, and to be the first to do it. What an advantage, my daughters, for those who are the first to enter an order in the beginning of its establishment, whose first age may be considered its golden age!"<sup>1</sup>

To maintain the sisters in humility, he returned again and again to their lowly origin. "Who are you? Poor country-girls." "Now, you know, my sisters, that the most of you are poor girls, who have been brought up in all the simplicity of a rustic life, as well as myself, for you are aware that my occupation in youth was to guard my father's flocks."

And again: "You are for the most part of humble origin. Oh, how great a favour God has bestowed upon you and me, to have chosen us from among the poorest class of people, in order to make use of us! This being really so, does it become us to pretend to be something great, to raise ourselves above what we really are? If the people of the world mistake us and esteem us more than we deserve, should we abuse their estimate of us? I say more: were you even of noble extraction, as some among you are, you should not value yourselves thereon. Was not the Son of God, as man, of royal extraction, and do not you behold Him humbling and abasing Himself, and practising continual mortification? It would be a fine thing, indeed, for a person to come to Paris with the desire, apparently, of serving God, of doing His holy will, and of labouring without ceasing, yet who, on her arrival there, would seek for conveniences which she had not enjoyed in the world, and who would elevate herself above what she really was, forgetting her humble birth, and that her food had hitherto consisted of a little soup, milk, fruit, and rarely of meat. Would not such a thing be worthy of pity! Be assured that the instant you forsake your coarse and simple manner of life, that your dress ceases

<sup>1</sup> *Conferences aux Filles de la Charité.*

to be poor and abject, that you wish to change your head-dress and other things which subject you to humiliations, you will begin from that moment to lose the grace of God, and also the esteem in which you have hitherto been held ; because by your way of living heretofore, you were considered humble and virtuous. It is on this account that the Ladies of Charity make use of you, that they love and honour you and that you are asked for in so many places."

At this point a sister confessed that she had been guilty of many offences on this point. "God be praised, my sister. I beg Him to accept this act of penance in satisfaction for the faults of which you acknowledge yourself guilty. It seems to me that vain-glory ought never to find entrance among you, inasmuch as you are, for the most part, poor country-girls, the children of labourers like myself ; in a word, we are nothing. As to the habit and the head-dress which you wear, you have no cause for vanity ; neither have you anything to boast of with regard to talent or education. As to nourishment, the poor have as good as you—a little beef, and that is all. You have no cause for self-esteem or presumption ; nor to pride yourself on your conversation or manner of speaking, for you seldom frequent any company but that of the poor, who are your masters, and you their servants."

One must be struck with the saint's delicacy of feeling, which never permits him to say, "You are poor, you are only villagers," without adding, "like myself." Humility first, and then tact.

Once more he says to them : "My sisters, I proposed to myself to speak to you on the festival of Saint Geneviève, and as she was a poor village-girl, my design was to entertain you with her virtues and those of other good village-girls, like the first members of the Company. As I was prevented from giving the conference on the day itself, I resolved to do it to-day, on the subject proposed. I will speak willingly to you of the virtues of these good village-girls, on account of the knowledge I have of them, both by experience and by the circumstances of my birth, being myself the child of a poor labourer, and having lived in the country till the age of fifteen. Our duties for many years were among the country-people, and we may say that there are not many persons who know their manners and understand their way of living better than the Priests of the Mission. I tell you then, that there are none better than those who possess the spirit of these good country-people ; none who are animated with a more lively faith, or who have recourse to



God with greater confidence in their necessities, or testify greater gratitude in prosperity. They are extremely simple; they use no artifice or words of double meaning; are not obstinate in their own opinion, nor attached to their own judgment, but believe simply all that is said to them. It is in this that you should imitate them.

“These good girls are truly humble; they do not take complacency or pride in what they possess, or speak of their birth or parentage; they think not of having more wit or talent than others, but regard all equally and with kindness. Though some among them have more wealth than others, they are not on that account proud and self-sufficient, but act the same towards all. Generally speaking, it is not so with those who have lived in cities, who are continually speaking of their homes, their relations, their conveniences, and even boast very often of having what they really do not possess.

“It is with that simplicity that you must always act, and all should labour to acquire the true spirit of these good village-girls, and endeavour to imitate them in their manner of living. I must say that there are some among you who possess this spirit, and who give me much consolation whenever I see them, particularly when I meet them in the streets carrying a basket to the sick. I cannot express the joy I feel thereat. Oh! God be praised!

“These worthy village-girls observe a great frugality at their repasts. They frequently content themselves with bread and soup, though they are continually employed in the most severe labours. It is thus that you must do if you wish to be true Sisters of Charity. Do not think that you are the only ones who have poor and common fare, for in many places the poor rarely have bread to eat. In Limousin they very often have nothing but bread made of chestnuts. In that part of the country from which I came, do you know upon what the good people subsisted for a great part of the year? They lived upon millet, which they cooked. Oh, how necessary is this frugality for a Sister of Charity!

“These good village-girls, like the great Saint Genevieve, cherish the holy virtue of purity. They never remain alone with men, and never listen to flattery, consequently they are ignorant of what it is to be flattered. Should anyone tell one of them that she was beautiful or graceful, her modesty would not be able to bear it, she would not even understand what it meant.

"I must tell you, too, how extremely modest these good village-girls are in their manner and deportment. They keep their eyes modestly cast down, are modest in their dress, which is coarse and plain. Thus should it be with the Sisters of Charity, never entering the dwellings of the rich but when the service of the poor demands it, and even then with great fear; not amusing themselves with observing what is in these houses, or by speaking to any one they meet, except with great reserve and modesty.

"Oh, how much consoled I am when I meet any among you who possess this spirit—you especially who are of high condition—going through the streets carrying a basket, and acting with such modesty as to inspire devotion wherever you go! Yes, there are some among you who excite admiration, and who practise virtue with great generosity.

"Again, can we behold a greater obedience than that of these good village-girls? They return from their labour, and if their parents send them back, they go immediately, without regarding the fatigue and weariness they feel, or the rain and mud through which they have to go, and without considering their dress or appearance. Behold how the Sisters of Charity should act. They return at noon from their duties and the service of the poor, to take their repast. If the doctor or the Sister-Servant tells them to take remedies to a sick person, they must do it immediately after their repast, without stopping to consider how they feel or how they look, but go promptly, renouncing themselves and their conveniences to practise obedience, and seeking only the comfort of the sick and not their own. I believe that you are almost all in this disposition,"<sup>1</sup>

Another point upon which he loved to dwell was the service of the poor and its dignity. "Oh, what a glorious title—Servants of the Poor! It might as well be said, servants of Jesus Christ, for He regards as done to Himself what is done to the poor. The Pope signs himself 'Servant of the servants of God,' and you, sisters, 'Servants of the Sick and Poor,' who are the well-beloved of our Lord. Oh, how happy are you, sisters, to have been destined by God to so great and holy an employment! The great ones of the world esteem themselves happy when they can devote a portion of their time to the service of the poor, and you can bear testimony—you particularly, our sisters of Saint-Sulpice—with what zeal and fervour those high-born Ladies of Charity accompany you in the good you do. Did not

<sup>1</sup> *Conférences aux Filles de la Charité*, vol. i. p. 76.

Saint Louis, with a truly admirable humility, devote himself to the service of the poor in the Hôtel-Dieu of Paris, which contributed so much to his sanctification? Did not all the saints likewise consider it an excellent work to render the same service to the poor? Humble yourselves, then, when you exercise this same charity, and often reflect that God has bestowed upon you a favour far above your merits. If for this reason the world honours and esteems you, how much more ought you to admire what God has done for you! I have just seen the Queen, who spoke of you very advantageously; upon which I must observe that you have great reason to fear being unfaithful to God and His grace, if you do not make every effort to observe the Rules which He has given you."

Not only were the Sisters of Charity to be devoted to the poor from a supernatural motive, but he wished them to be intelligent, active, punctual, obedient to the doctors in their orders, and to regulate everything so as to edify all.

Let us see his practical advice: "You should act, my sisters, with great respect and obedience towards the doctors, taking great care never to condemn or contradict their orders. Endeavour, on the contrary, to fulfil them with great exactitude, and without ever presuming to prepare the medicines according to your own way of thinking. Punctually follow what they have prescribed, both with regard to the quantity of the dose and the ingredients of which it is composed, because upon this fidelity and exactness depends nothing less, perhaps, than the life of the patient. Respect the doctors, not only because they are more learned and enlightened than you, but because God commands you in the Holy Scripture to do so in the following words: *'Honour the physicians, for the need thou hast of them. The kings likewise, and all the great ones of the earth, honour them.'* Why should you, my sisters, because you see and converse with them so frequently, fail to show them the honour and respect due to them? You are ignorant of the reasons they have for pursuing different methods in the treatment of maladies which seem to you to be the same. You must endeavour particularly to remember and observe their method of treating the sick, so that when you will be in the villages, or any other place in which there is no doctor, you may render yourselves useful by applying their method. You ought, therefore, to instruct yourselves, so as to know in what case it is necessary to bleed in the arm or in the foot; what quantity of blood you should take on each occasion; when to apply the cupping-glasses. Learn also

the different remedies necessary to be used in the various kinds of diseases, and the proper time and manner of administering them. All this is very necessary for you, and you will do a great deal of good when you are well instructed in it. I think it very essential that you should have some conferences with one another on this subject in the form of catechism.”<sup>1</sup>

Beyond and before the care of the body, Saint Vincent urged the sisters to look to the soul. “Do you think,” he said, “that God has only destined you to carry bread and meat, soup, and other remedies to the sick? Oh, no, He expects more from you; He wishes you to attend to their spiritual necessities, to give them a heavenly manna, and to communicate to them the Spirit of God.

“But you will say, We are ignorant; must we then instruct the poor? Yes, and you must not fear to do so; but, above all, you must never forget to beg most humbly of God that He will inspire you with what you ought to say, which He will never fail to do. Oh, how beautiful, how touching, to behold with what care you serve the sick, and to hear the words of piety which you address to them, clearly showing that your hearts are filled with the love of God, and that all you do is for the sake of your dear poor! O my daughters, do all in your power to serve them in this manner, and always scruple being with a poor person without giving him some instruction!”

The saint wished that they redouble their zeal at the hour of death. “Take great care to instruct the poor, and teach them how to die well. How consoling, my dear sisters, to aid these good people to reach heaven! Teach them, then, to serve God. Ah, sisters, you can do great things if you are faithful to God.”<sup>2</sup>

In order that they might be the more adapted for employment, Saint Vincent wished that they should be able to read, write, and do some arithmetic. “It is well that you should instruct yourselves, not for the sake of being learned, for science only serves to puff us up, and to swell the mind, filling it with pride. Learn, however, in order to facilitate the means of observing your Rules more exactly; that you may be able to keep a correct account of your expenditure, books, receipts; to write to your superiors from distant places in which you may be; to express your respect and dependence upon them; and above all, to teach the poor little girls of the village—in a word, that you may be able to serve God better.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Conférences aux Filles de la Charité*, vol. i. p. 76.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* <sup>3</sup> *Id.*

While Saint Vincent taught his spiritual daughters to visit and assist the poor, he was at the same time grounding them in the virtues of sweetness, humility, modesty, charity and mutual respect, which are the bonds of the religious life. He wished to see them living at home in angelic modesty and the greatest cordiality. "The sisters," said he," shall remember not to make noise in the house by closing or opening doors, particularly during the night. During recreation they shall converse quietly, striving always to speak in a moderate tone, which is suitable to them and gives edification,"<sup>1</sup> "They must manifest their mutual affection and esteem. But some one will say, 'She is only a poor girl.'—Oh! oh! she is one who has been honoured so far as to be sought for by God, and whom, after she had given her consent, He has chosen for His spouse. To what higher dignity can He raise her? If this sister was in the past a young lady of the world, she has now changed her former dress in order to assume the habit of contempt, and to devote herself to God in a state of abjection, humiliation and suffering. She has done this because she believed that God required it of her. Oh! could you witness anything more worthy of esteem?

"A sister will come from a distance of a hundred or a hundred-and-twenty leagues, from Flanders, from Holland, in order to consecrate herself to the service of the most abandoned beings in the world. Is not this seeking martyrdom? Yes, without doubt; for one of the Fathers says that 'he is a martyr who, giving himself to God, to serve his neighbour, suffers willingly all that he meets that is difficult and irksome in this employment.'"

We may easily infer that Saint Vincent, who was so solicitous for modesty and reserve in the house, was still more anxious for it when the sisters went abroad into the streets. "You ought at all times to be an example of modesty. How would it look to see a Sister of Charity going through the streets like a thoughtless, giddy person, looking about from one side to the other? O my daughters, if you were to act in this way, the world would soon say that sister will in a short time lose her vocation, and if the others follow her example the Company cannot long subsist! I am really edified when I meet any of you in the streets. God be praised! It is with great pleasure and satisfaction that I remember the great modesty of a sister whom I met coming from some place. I inquired of her who

<sup>1</sup> *Conférences aux Filles de la Charité*, vol. i. p. 76.

the person was to whom she had just spoken. 'Father,' she replied, 'I did not take notice.' My sisters, this is the way you should act, and think of nothing but your duty." <sup>1</sup>

This modesty, so great in the streets, was to be still more so in presence of ecclesiastics. "O sisters, avoid all familiarity with ecclesiastics, and have for them the greatest esteem and respect. Yes, there is nobody for whom we ought to have more reverence than ecclesiastics. The priest at mass changes the bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus Christ, and in the sacraments renders us friends from being enemies of God. Oh, certainly, we cannot have too much respect for the priest. For this reason always speak to them with the greatest modesty, not presuming to raise your eyes in their presence. Respect their holiness and the rank they hold in the Church of God."

On all these questions the saint interrogated the sisters, and from their young and pure hearts received answers that delighted him. For example, in the conference on union and disunion, more than thirty sisters spoke, and gave the most profound, and at the same time the most practical, motives for preserving at all costs union of hearts. Again, in the conference on the love of their vocation, it was the same. "I experienced great consolation at the last conference, each one expressed her thoughts so simply and clearly, it seemed to me that the words proceeded from her mouth like sparks of fire issuing from an immense furnace." <sup>2</sup>

To preserve this mutual cordiality, Saint Vincent found the best means was that they should inform one another of their faults. One day while he was speaking on this point, Mlle. le Gras went on her knees and asked to be told her defects. "It would not be just, mademoiselle, that all our sisters should have the happiness of being told of their faults, and that you and I should be the only ones deprived of so great a good, and that we should be so unfortunate as to have no one to practise this charity towards us. There shall then be a sister appointed who will be your assistant, and will hold your place in your absence. She shall receive the complaints which may be brought against you, listen to the faults of which they accuse you, and afterwards tell you of them if she judges it necessary. Behold how this custom is to be observed, and how I practise it myself. I have to complain, however, that he who is appointed to warn and admonish me has not sufficient charity for me, and often

<sup>1</sup> *Conférences aux Filles de la Charité*, vol. i. p. 76.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

passes over very considerable faults which I commit." At another conference he interrogated the sisters on this point. "Mademoiselle, tell us the reason why you should warn one another of your faults?"—"Father, it is one of the best means we have of correcting ourselves of our defects. One of our sisters having warned me, as I had begged her to do, I was so proud as to take it very ill. I must humbly ask your pardon—and of you, sister, who performed this act of charity towards me." The other sister in her turn, placing herself on her knees, said, "It is I, sister, who ought to ask pardon of you for not having given you the admonition in the proper manner."—"Oh, how good is this practice!" said our most honoured Father. "The one accuses herself of not having taken the correction well, and the other of not having given it in a proper manner. Rise, sisters," said Saint Vincent, "but the holy custom is to kiss the floor when you accuse yourselves of your faults."

An angelic purity was to complete the portrait of a Sister of Charity. Stationed by Holy Church at the bedside of the dying, she must there be a mother standing over her son; but to have chastity then, she must practise it always.

We may now judge of the virtue Saint Vincent required of the Sister of Charity—virtue of a heroic degree, but without which she could not fulfil her vocation. These virtues had as their source and their object the love of God. "Now, blessed be God, tell me, sister, why a Sister of Charity should love God with her whole heart?"—"Father, it is because He is infinitely good."—"That is true; but why is a Sister of Charity more particularly bound to love God than others?"—"Father, we are bound to love Him in a special manner, since He has drawn us from the world in order to place us in a state in which we have so many means of sanctifying ourselves. For my part, I am covered with confusion when I consider how little profit I derive from so many graces, but I am firmly resolved to be more on my guard for the future."—"Sister, by what marks can you know that you love God?"—"Father, it is when we feel a great desire to please Him."—"Ah, sister, that is indeed a certain mark, for if we have a great desire to please Him, not only shall we avoid offending Him, but we shall likewise study to accomplish His will in all things. How may we know that a Sister of Charity loves God?"—"Father, when we see her faithful in observing His holy commandments."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Conferences aux Filles de la Charité*, vol. i. p. 404.

In this manner were all the conferences carried out. The sisters spoke in turn, and their remarks evoked beautiful sentiments from the saint. Yet in Saint Vincent there were no extremes. He wished to see the sisters burning with the love of God, but free, detached from everything, always ready to leave all, even their exercises of piety, their prayer, their very communions, to attend to the wants of the poor. "Do without delay whatever regards the service of the poor, and if, instead of making your meditation in the morning, you have to carry the remedies to the sick, go in contentment and peace. Oh ! what a consolation for a good Sister of Charity to reflect and say to herself 'Instead of making my meditation or spiritual reading, I go to assist the poor sick who need my care so much, and I know that this action will be more agreeable to God.' Oh ! with this thought a sister goes cheerfully wherever God calls her."<sup>1</sup>

What a well-ordered mind ! Here is the true religion of which Saint James speaks—"Religion pure and unspotted with God and the Father is this : to visit the fatherless and widows in their tribulation, and to keep one's self undefiled from this world." In forming the Sisters of Charity he was forming all servants of the poor.

Often during these conferences the saint seemed lost in God, repeating a phrase twice or thrice, as if he could not restrain himself. Or again, joining his hands, he would exclaim with rapturous devotion : "My God, my God, my Saviour, my good Saviour !"

The conference closed with the saint's blessing. This was a privilege for the sisters, but a martyrdom for the humble man of God. "What," he would say, "a miserable sinner like me to bless souls so holy as you !" Sometimes, however, striking his breast, he submitted to their request and gave his blessing. "May Almighty God be pleased to shed abundantly upon you His own Spirit, which is that of love, meekness, sweetness, and charity. I, though so destitute of all virtues, especially of meekness and gentleness, will not hesitate to pronounce over you the words of benediction, placing all my confidence in His infinite mercy." Another day, after a conference on labour, he said : "I beg of God, who has laboured from all eternity within Himself ; I beg our Lord, who laboured from His youth, to pardon us all our loss of time, and particularly myself, who am unworthy of the bread I eat. I entreat Him to grant us the grace of sanctifying ourselves by our labours." Sometimes

<sup>1</sup> *Conferences aux Filles de la Charité*, vol. i. p. 404.



he positively refused to give his blessing. "I pray God, dear sisters, that He may pardon you all the faults you have committed. Wretch that I am, who do not keep my own rules, I beg pardon of Him, and of you also, sisters. How many faults have I not committed in your regard, and in that which concerns your work? I beg you to entreat of God that He may be merciful to me, and on account of my unworthiness I will ask our Lord Jesus Christ to give you His holy benediction Himself, and I will not pronounce the words to-day. I therefore beg of our Lord to do it."

Here Saint Vincent kissed the floor; but Mlle. le Gras and all the sisters, greatly afflicted that their Father should refuse to give them his blessing, entreated him with so much earnestness, that at last he granted their request.

"Pray to God then my sisters, that He may not regard my unworthiness, nor the sins of which I am guilty, but that He may show mercy to me; and now may He shed His benedictions upon you while I pronounce the words."

How such teaching warmed the young and tender hearts of the sisters! How it penetrated through the walls and attracted numbers to join them! They came from all sides, filling the humble house in the Rue du Cardinal-Lemoine. In vain did Mlle. le Gras utilise every nook and corner. Even in the corridors she had beds put up. In the end, however, it was necessary to leave that first and cherished cradle of the Company. On May 17, 1636, Mlle. le Gras with her sisters settled near the chapel Saint-Denis, which had the great advantage of being beside Saint-Lazare, where Saint Vincent was. The contract was signed by Mme. Goussault, who was becoming every day a greater friend and benefactress of the sisters. Already she was suffering from the malady that was to cause her death, and was manifesting under it the greatest sweetness, patience and resignation to the holy will of God. "O my God," writes Saint Vincent of her to Mlle. le Gras, "how sweet and firm is her submission to the will of God! It is nothing to have seen her in health in comparison to have seen her in death."

Assisted by Saint Vincent de Paul, nursed by Mlle. le Gras and the Sisters of Charity, whom she loved so much, this great soul had only one regret when about to die, that she had not long ago left all, noble lady though she was, to enter the humble Company of the Servants of the Poor. Perhaps it was to augment her regret, or perhaps to recompense her devotedness to them, that God showed her, the

night before her death, the future glory of the Sisters of Charity. "O my daughters, I must tell you that Mme. Goussault, who was a great servant of God, a holy soul, who loved your Company very much, said to me the night before she died : ' Ah, Father, how my mind was occupied with these good sisters this night ! If you only knew how much I think of them ! Oh, they will do great things ! ' " — " Yes," added Saint Vincent, " provided they are faithful."

<sup>1</sup> *Conferences aux Filles de la Charité*, vol. i. pp. 184-261

## CHAPTER III.

SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL EMPLOYS LAYMEN IN THE SERVICE  
OF THE POOR—THE SISTERS OF CHARITY (*continued*).

1633-1642

HERE then were two great armies raised up by Saint Vincent for the service of the poor ; the ladies of the world, with all their influence, their name and their wealth ; and the Sisters of Charity, with all their purity and heroic devotedness. Our saint, however, was labouring to form a third, a more difficult work, no doubt, but not less beautiful—the association for laymen. In works of charity a woman possesses more tenderness and sympathy, a man more authority and influence. His example strikes more forcibly, and there are some miseries he alone can undertake to cure. Moreover, every available force was called for, to combat the appalling misery we are about to narrate. For all these reasons Saint Vincent multiplied his efforts, in order that around the standard of charity might be grouped as many as possible who should become servants of the poor.

Saint Vincent's first endeavours in this direction date from his curacy in Châtillon-les-Dombes. The ladies' rules are dated 1617; those for men, Amiens, 1620. Was that the first ? Had he not established an association for men at Clichy and Châtillon ? In any case, to start from 1620, he began to multiply these associations : at Folleville, Montmirail, Joigny and Trévoux. Mâcon preserves the date of its foundation as 1623. Many autograph copies of these rules are found, almost written in the same terms, and fully expressing the saint's plans.

The association is a Christian one, having Jesus Christ, the Father of the poor, for its Patron. It is presided over by the curé, without whom neither the association for gentlemen nor that for ladies can do anything. Everybody is free to join, but thirty of the most zealous members are chosen to act as the pillars of the associations. From them are selected a president, treasurer, and visitor. The end of the association is to realise these words of Deuteronomy, "*Let there be no poor among you.*" As a matter of fact, in a well-organised town or city there

could not and should not be poor. If the poor were healthy, they ought to work, and the association should find it for them. If they were sick, too young, or not able to earn all, then the association should supply what was wanting. Finally, in the case of confirmed invalids the association should distribute weekly what was necessary for each. If this were the case there should be an end to begging. Our Lord has said, no doubt, "There shall always be poor among you ;" but He has not said "*There shall always be beggars.*" Poverty is in the order of Divine Providence ; begging is a disgrace to society. It is the mother of every vice, and a menace to civilisation itself.

We have seen how Saint Vincent adapted these associations to the resources of the places in which he established them. We shall not repeat these instructions here, but simply show the care he wished to be bestowed upon the soul even more than upon the body. "They shall see," he says, "that the children go to school, be taught their catechism, and brought to confession ; that the people be well instructed in their religion, and that they approach the sacraments. Heretics shall be brought back to the truth ; but if they remain obstinate, is that any reason for not admitting them to the hospital or refusing them aid ?" Michelet misrepresented the saint on this point. "What is astonishing," he says, "is, that having so tender a heart, yet he forgot his priestly character, and made a confession of faith a condition to receive assistance. But why ? If a starving man is a Lutheran or a Calvinist, must he die ? Must he abjure his belief to receive support ?"<sup>1</sup> M. Feillet, a man of deep learning and nobility of character, who accepted this unfounded accusation, retracted it in his work entitled *The Misery at the Time of the Fronde*. This is his retraction : "We take this opportunity to apologise for our accusation of intolerance against Saint Vincent de Paul in our work *Revue de Paris*. It arose from a quotation ; but a more serious study of the period, and a more intimate acquaintance with the work and letters of the saint, have convinced us that he never inquired of what religion a man was. On this account we declare our criticisms of 1856 were more specious than solid, and we unreservedly retract them from no other motive than respect and love of truth."<sup>2</sup> The fact is that this saintly priest wished that in giving aid to all, some might be brought to know the truth, and all to virtue.

In order that the members of the associations should never

<sup>1</sup> *Histoire de France*, vol. xii.    <sup>2</sup> *La Misère au temps de la Fronde*.

lose courage nor recoil before fatigue or danger, the saint wished that they should raise their minds above the poor, and see in them the suffering members of our Lord; that they should remember that the least service done to them was done to Him. In reciting the litany his voice was noticed to tremble at the words, "*Jesu pater pauperum.*"

Such are the characteristics of the association of laymen formed to serve the poor. It responded so well to the demands of the time that it spread with wonderful rapidity, not only to Folleville, Montmirail, Joigny, Trévoux, Mâcon, and more than thirty parishes, but even extended to Lorraine, Champagne, and Burgundy.

Its success was still greater in Paris. Now that Saint Vincent was established in Saint-Lazare, he did not neglect so grand a work, but utilised the opportunity the surrounding gentry afforded him, and interested them in the service of the poor.

Among these distinguished persons we must place in the first rank Baron de Renty, one of the noblest characters, not only of the seventeenth, but of any century.

Baron de Renty was born in the castle of Berry, in the diocese of Bayeux, in 1611. After brilliant studies at Bayeux and Paris, being opposed by his father in a desire to become a Carthusian, he married, at the age of twenty-two, Mlle. d'Entragues, a noble and virtuous young lady, by whom he had five children—two sons and three daughters. Like all his race, he was a soldier, but as remarkable for his piety as for his courage. A gentleman challenging him to a duel, he replied that God and his King prevented him from accepting his challenge; but that should he attack him, he would make him repent. The gentleman did attack him, with the result that Baron de Renty wounded, disarmed, and compelled him to surrender his sword. Then, as his only vengeance, he brought him to his house, staunched his wounds, and returned his sword. This shows what blood was in his veins; but soon his humility endeavoured to hide his brilliant qualities. He concealed his nobility, abandoned his titles, threw off his insignia, and when Louis XIV. offered to make him a councillor, he so humbly refused, that instead of his refusal hurting the King, his virtue evoked his profoundest admiration. Henceforth he entirely devoted himself to the poor, and made his castle a hospital, where, with his wife and daughters, he served them. In Paris, Dijon, Baume, wherever he was, he spent two or three hours in the Hôtel-Dieu. In his visits to the Blessed Sacrament he manifested such faith and

recollection, that, without his knowing it, the Ladies of Charity, the Sisters of Charity and the invalids came to watch him. To render his charity more useful, he had studied medicine, and could compound the ordinary prescriptions. No ulcer affrighted him; on the contrary, the more repulsive the more attractive to him. He was ever attending the poor, and adoring in them Jesus Christ. Could Saint Vincent wish for a more courageous and active helper? One day Baron de Renty met a Sister of Charity returning from visiting a sick person. "Where are you coming from, sister?" said he. "I was visiting Jesus Christ," she replied. "And so am I," said he. He assisted our saint in all his works, and took part in everything he was doing within the kingdom—the seminaries, the prisoners, the outcasts, the Hôtel-Dieu, the foundlings; and even outside of France, by assisting missions in Algiers, Tunis, Madagascar, Ireland, England, and Scotland. He was the right hand of Saint Vincent, and died at the age of thirty-seven, amid universal admiration at his accomplishing so much in so short a time.<sup>1</sup>

By his side we must place Henri-Michel Buche, a poor shoemaker, but a man of great intelligence, who undertook to reform all those of his class. For this end he founded two institutions, one for shoemakers and the other for tailors, which continued to exist down to the Revolution.

In the next place comes Commander de Sillery, who, having been Ambassador in Italy and Spain, and Commander of the Knights of Malta, urged by divine grace, devoted himself, under the direction of Saint Vincent, to the service of the poor. He sold all he possessed, left his grand residence, and aiming at perfection, humbly became a priest, and always continued to refuse any higher dignity in the Church. Letters of Saint Chantal and of Saint Vincent to him are as beautiful a testimony of his virtue as any servant of God might desire. "His death," writes Saint Vincent, "corresponded with his noble life. He entered heaven like a monarch about to take possession of his kingdom, in a peace and confidence that cannot be described."<sup>2</sup>

In the first rank of these gentlemen of the world must be named the two Marillacs (uncles of Mlle. le Gras), the Duke of Liancourt, the Marquis of Fénelon, M. Sublet des Noyers (Secretary of State), M. Dufour, and a large number of others whom it would be impossible to mention here.

Urged on by such example, and under the influence of Saint Vincent de Paul, laymen might be seen co-operating in every

<sup>1</sup> *Vie de M. de Renty.*

<sup>2</sup> "Letters," vol. i.

work of charity. "Would you believe," writes our saint, "that persons of both sexes, and of the highest society in Paris, are visiting, instructing, and exhorting the sick in the Hôtel-Dieu every day, and this, too, with the most admirable devotion and perseverance. They who have not seen it for themselves can scarcely credit it, and those who witness it are greatly edified, for, in truth, it is the life of saints serving our Lord in His suffering members."

While some were looking after the interests of those in the Hôtel-Dieu, others were engaged with prisoners, or aiding and consoling the outcasts. "At the head of this group are M. de Morangis, the Marquis de Laval, the Marquis d'Urfé, Viscount d'Argenson, MM. de Lavan, d'Ornano, Talon, and Du Belloy. They visit the prisons and investigate the cases, releasing those who deserve it. The King contributed a large annuity, and the Archbishop of Paris ransomed every Palm Sunday a prisoner recommended by the association."<sup>1</sup>

As in Paris, so in the large towns, associations of laymen were formed for the service of the poor. "Baron de Renty has established here (Caen) many associations, which meet every week and consult how the poor may best be assisted. Similar reports come from Burgundy and Amiens, where, through his example and influence, many generous-hearted persons joined and laboured with great fruit in the service of the poor." He wrote on one occasion to a superior of a mission-house, "If you think I could establish the association of laymen in your town, I shall do my utmost to go there, but I believe I shall do more harm than good." Following the example of Saint Vincent, wherever he founded the association he left a copy of the rules, drawn up unquestionably by our saint in Paris. The other gentlemen of the associations followed the example of Baron de Renty, and a holy enthusiasm for serving the poor spread throughout France.

What had been begun in Paris, and continued in the provinces, Saint Vincent wished to see completed by the lords and gentry who possessed large estates. "Whoever," says he, "owns a great property has received from God an obligation to watch over the souls under him, and is responsible in proportion to the extent of his authority. Let him take care especially of the poor, the orphan, and the abandoned, it is his duty; but let him not forget the others, for all are committed to his charge." That these truths, too often forgotten by the upper classes, might be

<sup>1</sup> Maynard, vol. ii.

the better known and practised, the saint propagated a pamphlet, which he styled *How to Assist the Poor*, but which might more appropriately be called, *The Duties of Lords to their Tenantry*. Here are some extracts :—

“The great commandment of Christianity is to love God and our neighbour, and the Christian shows himself worthy of so great a name when he practises charity towards the wretched and miserable. This obligation of charity is binding on all, but more particularly on those who possess the good things of earth. If they have a right to possess and receive, they are likewise bound to assist those in necessity. Very true is that which a great Father of the Church has said : ‘He is a murderer who does not assist the poor when he is able—*Non pavisti, occidisti.*’ Those, therefore, who in the present necessity are anxious to acquit themselves of this duty towards the poor, may use with advantage this little pamphlet, which has already served some, illustrious alike by their piety and by their birth. In the first place, it is only right that the lord of the place should visit the poor, and see for himself their state, noting the name and age of the parents, and the number and age of their children. If the poor are sick, he should adopt means to cure them, and failing the presence of the Association of Charity, he should send a doctor to prescribe suitable remedies. As regards nourishment, twice a week half a pound of meat and a pound of bread should be sent for each sick person. When those poor people can work, he should find it for them on his own estate when it is difficult to get it elsewhere. When he happens to discover an orphan or a foundling, he must take particular care of its education, religious instruction, and nourishment. The same spirit of God which moves him to assist the poor ought likewise to make him solicitous for the churches and pastors within his sphere of influence. Again, the same spirit should make him vigilant with the justices to suppress crime and encourage good order, to settle lawsuits and disputes, to forbid blasphemies, to prevent, as much as possible, taverns, to punish drunkards and prohibit the sale of drink during church time, to correct and remove abandoned women ; in fine, to do everything that may tend to the better service of God.”

This was the advice Saint Vincent gave to the lords and gentry of the seventeenth century. To his mind a lord was a petty king, and a minister of God to do good. The times have changed, and so has the social condition of the classes, but their duties to each other remain the same. The successors of these



great lords are gravely culpable if they do not feel bound by the same obligations, all the more pressing now on account of the troubled spirit that is abroad.

Political events were adding to the ordinary miseries new misfortunes still more worthy of tears. Saint Vincent learned from Baron de Renty that many of the nobility of Lorraine were to be found in the garrets of Paris. These unfortunate persons, stripped of their property, driven from their homes by the war, and justly ashamed of their downfall, were living in extreme poverty, nay, some even dying of want. At the suggestion of Saint Vincent, the laymen's assembly voted the necessary funds, and directed some of their members, with Baron de Renty at their head, to seek out these unhappy noblemen. They discovered a heart-breaking sight. "On their report being given, the assembly renewed the grant for another month. The month passed, and they returned to Saint-Lazare to bind themselves for a third, and thus it was month after month for twenty years, during which their charity was kept burning by the zeal of Saint Vincent de Paul."<sup>1</sup>

About this time there were flocking into Paris large numbers of nobility, priests and religious of both sexes, who had been forced to leave England, Ireland and Scotland in consequence of the religious and political agitation which ended in the beheading of Charles I. Could they be abandoned? If even debt was to be incurred, was it not a duty as Christians and as men of honour to come to their help? The assembly undertook their relief, and as usual Baron de Renty was in the van. "Every month he went on foot through the most remote quarters of Paris, which he had chosen to mortify himself all the more, and there he distributed aid. According to the custom and advice of Saint Vincent he graciously saluted the refugees on entering, and then with an admirable delicacy of feeling asked them to accept their monthly allowance. He remarked to his companion one day, 'Behold true Christians, who have left all for God. What are we in comparison, who have lost nothing and want for nothing? They are content with two crowns a month, after possessing fifteen or twenty thousand livres a year, and even suffer their loss with patience and resignation. We, who have abundance, are chary of our charity. Ah! sir, it is not in signs nor in words, but in the heart and in deeds, that Christianity consists.'"<sup>2</sup>

Although the assembly of laymen was composed of rich lords,

<sup>1</sup> Maynard, vol. iv.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

yet so great was the demand, that money was often wanting at the beginning of the month. Happily Saint Vincent was always ready to replenish their purse. "M. Vincent," writes one of the members, "was always the first to contribute. He opened his heart and his purse, depriving himself even of necessities in order to complete a good work. On one occasion, to make up the required amount, three hundred livres were necessary. Saint Vincent at once gave them, though it was known that the sum was a gift he had just received to buy another horse, for the one he had was too old and wretched to hold out any longer. But he preferred to suffer inconvenience, and even danger, than see people in want and not relieve them." In similar circumstances on another occasion two hundred livres were required. Saint Vincent asked the bursar how much he had in the office? He replied, "Merely what is necessary for the community to-morrow, for you know, sir, we are now becoming numerous."—"But tell me exactly how much you have."—"Fifty crowns."—"What! Is there no more in the house?"—"No, sir, positively no more."—"Well, even so, get them." The bursar brought the fifty crowns to Saint Vincent, who handed them over at once to the assembly to make up the balance of their monthly charities. Without any anxiety he abandoned himself and his priests to Divine Providence. He was not deceived. Kind Providence, as a matter of fact, came to his rescue in the person of a rich lord who had heard and seen all. This man sent the next day to Saint-Lazare a purse containing a thousand francs.

At the same time that the saint was procuring pecuniary aid for the members of the assembly, he was also sustaining their courage, enlivening their faith, and at their spiritual retreats in Saint-Lazare addressing them in burning words of zeal and charity. He often had them to make short retreats, for he knew that there was nothing so stimulating for souls. "It was a wonderful and edifying sight," writes Abelly, "to see in the same refectory, lords, viscounts, marquises, barristers, judges, merchants, soldiers, artisans, and even footmen. All were welcome to make their retreat in this great hospice of charity."

"It is computed," continues Abelly, "that the house of Saint-Lazare alone received annually from seven to eight hundred persons to make a retreat. The other houses of the Congregation of the Mission likewise received them, and particularly the house in Rome, where many were always to be found. From 1635 to the death of Saint Vincent, twenty-five

years afterwards, the number who made retreats is estimated at over twenty thousand.”<sup>1</sup>

It is impossible to estimate the good these exercises produced. What extraordinary conversions! How many, naturally inclined to evil, were totally changed! “I recommend to your prayers,” writes Saint Vincent, “a certain person who is in retreat, and who unquestionably is capable of doing a great deal of good, if he is entirely converted to God; while, on the contrary, if he is not converted, there is great reason to fear he will do much evil.”

On another occasion he wrote: “We have in retreat a captain who wishes to become a Carthusian, and was sent here to test his vocation. I beg of you to recommend him to our Lord, and to reflect on His goodness in inspiring a person with such a change of life.”

“We have also another captain, for whom too we beg your prayers, as likewise for a convert who labours hard by writing to win over others. May God be praised for all. O God! how beautiful are the workings of your Holy Spirit, and how strong is grace, that so many men should have come from all parts to mortify themselves. A spiritual retreat is indeed to crucify the flesh, and in it we may say with the Apostle, *‘I am crucified to the world, and the world is crucified to me.’*”

Thus, at the bidding of Saint Vincent, and under his direction, laymen were ranging themselves under the banner of charity. They were placing their influence and their wealth at the service of the poor, and endeavouring to become more Christian in order to become more devoted. They were laying the foundation of that grand “Society of Saint Vincent de Paul,” which is sometimes thought a birth of our day, but is in reality a revival of this great movement of charity.

While Saint Vincent was endeavouring to inspire the Sisters of Charity with the spirit with which he wished to see them animated, he was slowly unfolding to them the constitution which he contemplated giving them. That constitution was singularly courageous. It took our saint more than twenty years to conquer public opinion, the objections of the King and Parliament, and the prudent hesitation of the Pope and Cardinals. It is true now, however, that the constitution, after having been an object of wonder to the world, has become an object of admiration. Here is its fundamental idea.

Up to that time, when a maiden wished to consecrate herself

<sup>1</sup> Abelly, vol. i.

to God, she entered an enclosure, which, in the troubled state of society in the Middle Ages, gave her complete security. After her novitiate she made solemn vows, and these were recognised by the State, so that she could not validly marry, inherit or bequeath property, nor return to the world, and was thus strengthened in her resolution. The Church accepted and exalted these State regulations. The cloister was made venerable, as a holy and happy sanctuary. The grill that concealed these maidens was a voluntary prison, but a prison of love, in which God held captive souls that He had chosen for Himself. These vows were the nails that bound them with Jesus on the cross for the salvation of the world, and the virgin consecrated to God was a voluntary and living oblation for the sins of men, and a shining light for society.

Hence as the Sisters of Charity began to be formed, the grand ideal of the religious state rose up before their minds.

Why should not they, too, have vows? Why not add to their good works the happiness and the merit of being irrevocably consecrated to God by vows? Saint Vincent heard all this, but turned a deaf ear. Were those vows to be simple or solemn? According to the laws of Church and State, solemn vows necessitated strict enclosure. What then would become of the service of the poor? If the vows were simple, yet perpetual, how inconvenient it would be! How could young ladies, bound by perpetual vows, but not protected by the civil power, be sent into the poor garrets of Paris? They might abandon their vocation, validly marry, and become a scandal to society and a temptation to religious. For these reasons Saint Francis de Sales had been prevailed upon to modify so much the Rule of the Visitation.

Saint Francis de Sales had yielded, and like a great painter forced to abandon a noble conception, realised another no less grand. But since his time twenty years had gone by, and the absolute necessity of the service of the poor by sisters consecrated to God had become more evident. Saint Vincent had decided not to yield. Either his spiritual daughters should have no vows, or such as admitted of visiting the poor. He loved, he venerated the cloister, but that was not what he wanted. The door of the convent which he contemplated was to be open day and night, and that is the grand characteristic of the constitution of the Sisters of Charity.

"At first," says Saint Vincent, "it was thought proper that the name of Association should continue, fearing that if instead

of it you were to be called a Congregation, there might be some among you who in some future time would wish to change the house into a cloister, and become religious, as the Daughters of St. Marie have done.<sup>1</sup> God has permitted that poor country-girls should succeed those ladies, and it is to be feared that in the course of time some weak and ill-disposed minds may wish to introduce some change in your Company, either in your customs or manner of life—in your head-dress, for example, saying, ‘What! to be dressed in this manner, to wear such a head-dress when we go to visit the poor? Really it is ridiculous! we must have something different to wear on the head, and a handkerchief for the neck, that we may be better covered.’ O sisters! if ever they should wish to persuade you to introduce these changes, reject their proposals, and answer boldly that you wish to obtain the crown which God had promised to the Daughters of St. Marie. You are not religious in the proper sense. Be firm then, and permit no change. Religious must needs have a cloister, but the Sisters of Charity must go everywhere.” To emphasise this point the saint wished that the word cloister should not be used to designate their houses. “No other monastery,” said he, “than the house of the sick, no other chapel than the parish church.” Likewise, he wished them to retain their secular dress. “O my daughters, who could have given to the Church a Company of Sisters of Charity in secular costume?” Again, in the approbation of their rules, it is said, “The Sisters of Charity, by a holy inspiration, have resolved to live in community, retaining, however, their secular dress.”

Their costume was that of the ordinary women of the environs of Paris. A grey habit, and a large white head-dress, known as the cornette, was their simple attire. Some thought that a veil was required, but to this Saint Vincent replied, “Modesty is their veil.” To perfectly adapt the new institution to its work, Saint Vincent not only discarded solemn vows that required the enclosure, not only passed over perpetual vows, such as they were, but merely asked the Sister of Charity to bind herself from year to year. Perhaps if he had been free he should have required none, and so allow their devotedness its full liberty. “You shall make it a practice then, sisters, to go to the Bishop, ask his blessing, and testify your obedience to him and your devotion to the poor. You shall say that you are not religious in the strict sense, but vow poverty, chastity, and obedience for one year.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “Conferences,” vol. ii.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

Despite all opposition the saint created this new type of servants of God in the service of His poor. "The Sister of Charity shall have for her convent the house of the sick, for her cell the chamber of suffering, for her chapel the parish church, for her cloister the streets of the city or the wards of an hospital. Obedience shall be her enclosure, the fear of God her grate, and modesty her veil."<sup>1</sup>

Providence blessed this courageous undertaking. Not only the Sisters of Charity, but almost all the religious orders of women for the last three hundred years have adopted this rule and given to the world a spectacle unintelligible to human wisdom. Each year many thousand religious in France and throughout the world are free, their vows end with a day.<sup>2</sup> Picture such a spectacle—thousands of religious free to return to the world, to marry if they choose, and yet on the morrow at holy mass they freely and willingly put on again these chains, which of themselves fell off, without even an effort on the part of their captives. What say you now, calumniators of the religious life?

This courageous undertaking, though it had succeeded so well, was open, nevertheless, to many dangers, and of these Saint Vincent frequently spoke to his spiritual daughters. Often he said: "You are not religious in the strict sense, and can never be, because of the service of the poor. You must therefore even be holier than religious, since you have greater temptations and less security; if you are not truly holy, you shall certainly be lost." Again: "You have no grate to shut you off from the dangers of the world; you must erect one in your own interior, which will be far better. Learn well your rule which says, 'The Sister of Charity shall have for enclosure the virtue of obedience.'" One day as he was asking the sisters to express their opinions on this subject, one of them said: "Father, as religious have their cloister, and we have not, obedience is all the more necessary for us, otherwise we shall be exposed to the great danger of committing many faults."—"Ah, my God! that is well said. Oh, how true it is! Well, then, sister, you think that by means of obedience you ought to be as recollected and reserved as religious within their cloister?"—"Yes, Father, and although we are not enclosed, we do not cease on that account to be as much

<sup>1</sup> Regles

<sup>2</sup> On 25th March of each year every Sister of Charity is free, so that she may renew her vows or not.

obliged to practise obedience as nuns.”—“So that, sisters, obedience is your enclosure. How edifying it is to see a Sister of Charity serving the sick in a public parish, and yet leading the life of a cloistered religious! If this sister were guided by her own will, and lived in a state of independence, she would make no difficulty to go sometimes to one place, and then to another, to make visits; to go to the house of a lady of her acquaintance or of a relation, or to stop longer than would be necessary in the places to which she should have to go. Holy obedience prevents all this; she goes only to those places in which her services are needed, and therefore she does not lose her time in useless visits. Was it not this you meant, sister, when you said that religious have their cloisters, but that the Sisters of Charity have none but obedience?”—“Yes, sir.”—“And do you think that you can lead as holy a life as a religious within her enclosure?”—“Yes, Father.”—“Yes, sisters, doubt it not; and be assured that there is nothing more edifying to behold, nothing more agreeable to God, more admirable in the sight of angels and of men, nor a spectacle more worthy of exciting wonder and astonishment, than to see poor Sisters of Charity in hired rooms, or the wards of hospitals, exposed to the gaze and remarks of those who know nothing of their manner of life. Thus they manifest their submission and obedience in such a manner, that it may be said in truth, that they never do their own will, because they never do anything but through obedience. Oh yes, if you act in a spirit of obedience, there can scarcely be anything greater than what you do, nor can religious shut up in a cloister all their lives do more than you. Persons of the world must under no circumstances whatever enter the apartments of the Sisters of Charity, except the parlour or reception room. This must be observed, no matter how high the person may be—not even the confessor.”

By such wise and firm precautions did Saint Vincent create a new form of the religious life without prejudice to the old. Nay, he rather let loose the waters and multiplied the harvest, as when some river overflows and fructifies the land all around.

Nine years had already gone by, and if we except Mlle. le Gras, none of the sisters had been permitted by Saint Vincent to consecrate themselves to God by vow, even for a year. Always prudent, and an enemy of haste, he at length chose four sisters, whom he permitted to consecrate themselves by vow on March 25, 1642.

Who were these privileged ones it is difficult to say. Two at least are known, Sister Barbe Engiboust and Sister Jeanne Dallemagne. We can only surmise the others. Sister Barbe Engiboust was, properly speaking, the first Sister of Charity. Born near Chartres, of the farming class, she was courageous and strong. We do not know where she excelled, whether in her tenderness towards the foundlings, holding them even for nights in her arms, when cradles were wanting, or in her patience with the galley-slaves, under their insults and injuries, or finally in appeasing the warders about to chastise the convicts. No difficulty made her lose courage. When some laymen of distinction wished to see the sisters' apartments, Sister Barbe was inflexible, and held her ground against all opposition. Under other circumstances she was likewise admirable, and always won the highest esteem from Saint Vincent. At his bidding she was ready to go to the ends of the earth. When she died she looked so beautiful that the people accused the sisters of having painted her.

Marguerite Laurence, who entered shortly after Sister Barbe, and was undoubtedly one of the first group, was of a very different nature. Lively, of a playful disposition, as she went along through the streets and saw the gaiety around her she had to press the crucifix to her heart, in order not to stop and look on. "You are more beautiful than all," she said to herself while clasping her cross, and then she passed on. She was generous, and capable of any sacrifice, and her delight in receiving a sister's habit was unbounded. Her mother wrote to her the following letter on the occasion : "My child, I am greatly consoled to learn of the joy you felt in changing your worldly dress for the habit of poverty and of a servant of Christ. It will adorn you more than the satin and silk of the world, when your soul is possessed of the virtues of penance, humility, obedience, and, above all, a holy love and fear of God. Love with your whole heart that enslavement in the service of the poor which you have chosen at the feet of Jesus crucified for the remainder of your life. Ever remember your first fervour, and when it cools, go to our Lord and rekindle that fire in your heart which was burning so brightly when you left your father and me. Ah ! how happy I should be to have borne in my womb a child whom I shall one day see crowned in heaven, for having, like her Saviour Jesus Christ, wished to be despised and contemned, and to suffer in body and mind." Holiness is easy with such a mother.



We must reckon among these first sisters, although it is not known that she was one of the four, Anne de Geunes. She was the first Sister of Charity of noble extraction that entered the Congregation, but her humility surpassed her nobility. To allude to her high birth was to mortify her. She rejoiced among the poor, whom she served as she would have served Jesus Christ. Such was her delight in being with them that she often said she preferred to meet the poor than her relatives.

Marie Lullen was another worthy of mention. She adored Jesus Christ in the poor, and kissed the feet of the orphan child as if it were the Infant Jesus.

We might name many others, but must hasten on to Jeanne Dallemagné, who, with Barbe Engiboust, was certainly one of the four who consecrated themselves by vow on March 25, 1642. Having entered in 1638, she was thus only a few years in the Company. The Carmelites were anxious they should possess this innocent soul, and the Princess de Condé would have enabled her to join any convent she liked; but she entered the Sisters of Charity, in order to serve the poor. She died quite young, in the odour of sanctity, worn out by fatigue and devotion to the poor. "Oh! how virtuous, sisters," Saint Vincent used to say in speaking of her. "In that sister we had a great treasure. Oh! what a loss, and God grant that it is not my sins, wretch that I am, that are the cause of it all." What struck our saint most about this sister was her profound humility and extraordinary tact. She used to say of herself, "I can do nothing well." Everything, however, she undertook through obedience had exceptional success, and a sister who worked with her for eighteen months declared that she could not discover in her the slightest imperfection.

When she was attacked by a serious malady which caused her death, she said she had only one regret, and that was that she had not served the poor enough, and that if God spared her she would try to do more for them in future. During her last illness she tried to speak to the sisters and say how happy they were to be able to serve the poor, and she hoped that they would do it better than she. This was said only through humility, for she had infinite tenderness towards the poor. One day she asked a sister for some bread to give to a beggar, and on receiving a hard crust, she said, "O sister! that will do for me, but we must give nothing to God but the best."

"The last time I saw her," says Saint Vincent, "I asked

her, 'Which would you now prefer to have been, a Sister of Charity or a great lady of the world?'—'Oh!' she replied, 'a Sister of Charity.' A beautiful sentiment, my dear sisters, and one which ought to show you that your condition is far above that of the great ladies of the world, for to be a Sister of Charity is to be a daughter of God."

Thus we see the nobility of character concealed under the humble dress of a Sister of Charity. Henceforth, when war, famine, and pestilence spread misery over the land, Saint Vincent de Paul had at his command an army of charity, which, if it did not completely destroy poverty and suffering, for they are inseparable from humanity, at least soothed the sufferer, and when even that could not be done, spread around him a perfume of resignation and of hope.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE PRIESTS OF THE MISSION.

1625-1642

It is now time to fix our attention on that house of Saint-Lazare placed by God in the centre of Paris as a new source of life and light, the richest fountain in the seventeenth century of charity under all its aspects. At that time it stood in the wide space which separated Paris from Saint-Denis, but which is now a busy street. There, at No. 117, in what used to be a leper hospital, one of the most original and most courageous conceptions of Saint Vincent de Paul began to be realised, the Congregation of the Mission.

Its originality consisted in this, that it was the first and only company of priests in the Church entirely and exclusively devoted to the poor. This was Saint Vincent's idea from the beginning. Already he had founded associations of charity for men and women; he had taught the upper classes in Paris to serve the poor, and, above all, he had raised up the Sister of Charity, that visible incarnation of the virtue of charity. But all these great works, so necessary and so successful, had not turned away Saint Vincent for a moment from carrying out his original plan. Higher than the body was the soul; higher than to soothe physical suffering, though a most noble work, was to guard and save the souls of the poor, darkened by ignorance, and degraded by vice.

Not that there were not in the Church plenty of religious orders who were labouring most earnestly and successfully. There were the Jesuits, but they occupied themselves most fruitfully with the upper classes. Again, there were the Dominicans, but they were the learned doctors who taught in the universities. There were also the Franciscans, especially the Capuchins, but they were doing so much good at the Sorbonne and other universities, that in the seventeenth century the poor were worse off than any class in point of instruction. Now it was to supply this want that Saint Vincent de Paul wished to raise up a body of priests entirely devoted to the service of the poor.

The idea was superb, well worthy of our saint, but how difficult to realise ! To apply priests, eminent men—for they should be such—simply and solely to educate the poor country-people ; to debar them from lecturing to learned audiences in the universities ; to forbid them preaching in the grand churches and cathedrals, and to confine them exclusively to the poor, dull, country-people—what a folly to attempt such a task, unless priests could be found whose humility was almost without measure.

“ O gentlemen ! ” the saint frequently said to his first disciples, “ the poor are our portion. *Evangelizare pauperibus misit me.* What a blessing ! Gentlemen, what a blessing ! to do that which our Saviour has come upon earth to do, to continue the work of this God-Saviour, who forsook the cities to go to seek the poor in the rural districts—in a word, to aid the poor, our lords and masters, such is our mission.

“ What ought to attach us very much to this mission is that it has been specially confided to us. As far as I know, no other body has proposed to itself as its principal object and end the evangelisation of the poor, especially the most abandoned poor. O God ! that there should be a Congregation, and this the Congregation of the Mission, composed of poor men, who, charged with this noble commission of going hither and thither, from village to village, forsake the cities—what was never done before—and fly to announce the Gospel to the poor alone ; this is indeed wonderful, and yet it is our vocation.”<sup>1</sup>

But the more exalted was their mission and the more contrary to the inclinations of nature, the more he felt certain that his disciples should fail if he had not succeeded in establishing them in the profoundest humility. Hence he frequently told them that they were unworthy of their vocation, poor and ignorant like himself, and incapable of doing anything ; that the Congregation was the least of all, and its members the most wretched both in quality and quantity. He spent fifty years of his life in preaching thus to his disciples, and in establishing them in humility which nothing would be able to shake. Devoted exclusively to the service of the poor, and hidden in the profoundest humility, the Congregation grew slowly. Saint Vincent began with a single priest, M. Portail, and in 1626 M. de la Salle and M. du Courdray joined, but for ten years after that the number did not reach thirty. In the eyes of the world the undertaking was a failure, but Saint Vincent did not lose courage.

<sup>1</sup> “ Conferences.”

It is true that those who came to enter were received by no means eagerly, and it required a special grace from God to persevere. When M. Almeras, that eminent man who succeeded Saint Vincent as Superior-General, presented himself for admission to the Congregation, the saint endeavoured to dissuade him. Already this young priest had had to listen to the objections of his relatives, who said: "What! going to join the Congregation of the Mission! It is composed merely of poor priests. You will die of weariness. Why not join the Jesuits or the Dominicans?" When he presented himself to Saint Vincent, almost the same sentiments were expressed by him. "O sir, do you wish to join us? Evidently you don't know us. We are only poor folk, not very sociable or polished, without much means or security, and obliged to go wherever obedience sends us." The saint then described their poverty and scanty furniture, which was enough to repel any one. But notwithstanding all that, M. Almeras was determined to enter, for, said he, a man who abandons the world and its pleasures, ought no longer to love anything but poverty, suffering and humiliation. He thought that a person who puts on the habit of a religious should desire or seek nothing else, and thus all Saint Vincent said to dissuade him only served to strengthen his resolution.<sup>1</sup>

What Saint Vincent said to young René Almeras he said to everyone. From the way he spoke one might have thought the Congregation was composed of idiots, and that one should have lost one's mind to enter it. The saint spoke in this manner so frequently and with such sincerity that in the end Père de Condren began to believe him. "O M. Vincent," said he, "how happy is your Congregation to bear such marks of divine institution! For as when Jesus Christ founded His Church, He was pleased to select poor fishermen and sinners to spread His Gospel, in order the better to show forth His power, so in like manner in your Congregation most of its members are poor, of low birth or of little learning. And yet the whole kingdom is stirred by the spirit of your Company, and the late King even said that if he recovered he would not allow a bishop to be consecrated till he had spent three years with you."

The disciples of Saint Vincent were very far, however, from being so ignorant as the saint in his humility endeavoured to make people believe. "One day at an entertainment

<sup>1</sup> Abelly.

held in Clermont College one of the saint's disciples was present, and without intending it, took a higher place than was reserved for him. The rector sent a messenger to ask him to change. The priest replied in excellent Latin that he was very comfortable and preferred to remain where he was. The messenger, not understanding the Latin, returned to the rector, who came to the conclusion that the priest should either be an Irishman or a Pole, and sent another messenger, who asked him in Latin to move lower down. This time the priest replied in Greek. Then the professor of rhetoric approached, and to him he replied in Hebrew ; till at last some one recognised who he was, and had him conducted to a seat among the most distinguished guests. When the priest returned to Saint-Lazare he related the joke, but Saint Vincent did not approve of it, saying : " A poor missionary should not seek high places in an assembly, nor speak of himself. I ask you, sir, to return and beg pardon of the rector for the disedification you have given." The priest willingly obeyed, and left as great an impression of his virtue as of his learning.<sup>1</sup>

Saint Vincent lost no opportunity of instilling into the minds of his disciples lowly sentiments and utter contempt for what the world most esteems.

M. du Coudray was well versed in the Syriac and Hebrew languages. It was proposed that he should render the Syriac version into Latin, and so reflect credit on the rising Congregation, while doing a service to the Church. It was also suggested that he should write against the Jews, and use the Talmud, which he understood better than themselves. M. du Coudray lent a willing ear to these suggestions, but before beginning he went to ask leave. " O sir," replied Saint Vincent, " I beg of you not to think of such a thing ! That kind of work feeds the curiosity of the learned, but is of no use towards the salvation of the poor country-people, for whom especially God has destined us. There are millions of souls in France, sir, who hold out their hands and exclaim in the most touching manner : ' Alas, sir, you have been chosen by God to contribute to our salvation ; have pity on us then, for we are buried in ignorance and sin. To relieve us we want neither Syriac nor Latin versions. Your own zeal and the coarse jargon of our mountains will suffice, without which we are in great danger of being lost.' " <sup>2</sup> These are admirable sentiments of Saint Vincent, but we must not conclude from them that he undervalued the place of

<sup>1</sup> Maynard, vol. ii. .

<sup>2</sup> " Letters," vol. i.

science and learning in the Church. On the contrary, he felt the highest esteem, nay, the absolute necessity of it. But the object of his little Congregation was entirely different. There was no question of founding colleges or universities, there were plenty of them already; nor of giving to the Church learned doctors, for they abounded. No! what was urgently wanted were missionaries among the poor, apostles among the country-people.

While Saint Vincent was thus keeping prominently before his disciples the main end of the Congregation, he was also furnishing them with means to attain it. He laid it down as a first principle that his missionaries were not to preach in cities, but to confine themselves to the country districts. In vain did the most zealous bishops try to obtain a mission in their cities, and likewise in vain did even Louis XIII. and Anne of Austria endeavour to persuade our saint to send missionaries to Rheims and Metz. Saint Vincent humbly but resolutely answered that his missionaries were destined for the poor country-people, and that their first rule was not to preach in cities. "Oh!" replied the Queen, "I did not know that, and be assured I shall never ask them to act contrary to their rule."

The second rule was that the missions were to be given gratuitously, for the poor country curés were unable to pay; however, something might be taken if offered by the rich lords and gentry of the locality. The missionaries brought with them all the necessaries for a prolonged stay, and they might be seen in the mountains of Savoy bringing their bedding and provisions on mules, and lodging themselves in out-houses and barns. Their poverty and mortification edified the poor country-people, who were unaccustomed to such a spectacle. The missions were given always by two, sometimes three, and often even more priests, for Saint Vincent believed that one man, however eloquent, could not stir the people sufficiently, and for the same reason he instructed them to remain a month, or even two or three, in the same place. "Without a long and diligent sojourn," said the saint, "what are missions?—straw fires, a ray of light in darkness." While Saint Vincent was confining the attention of his missionaries to the poor, he was also teaching them to use simple, clear, practical language in their discourses. With this in view, from the very beginning he reduced all his rules to what he called the Little Method, and this we must examine rather closely, for it was the great weapon of the

missioners, the lever by which they successfully moved their audience.

"This Little Method consists in going straight to the point of our discourse, without using language too high or too low, but such as is suited to our audience, and capable of being understood by the dullest among them. It instructs, moves, deters from vice, inclines to virtue, and produces the most admirable effects everywhere it is employed. Behold in what our Little Method consists." The missionaries were to leave aside all the grandiloquence and erudition which encumbered the sermons of this period, and of which the people had neither need nor understanding.

The saint wished that they should go straight to the point, giving the reasons why such a truth should be believed or such a virtue practised ; in what such a truth or virtue consists, and the means of acquiring it. "It may all be reduced to this," said he. "Following this method, in the first place, we make evident the reasons and motives which can affect and move the soul to detest sin and vice, and to seek virtue. But it is not enough to announce to me the imperative obligations I am under of having a virtue, if I know not what that virtue is, nor in what it chiefly consists ; what are its works and its functions ? And there you have the second point effecting this ; for, according to our method, after the motives which should incline our hearts to virtue, we make apparent in the second place in what that virtue consists, what is its essence and its nature, what are its properties, what its functions, its acts and their opposites, the marks and the practice of this virtue. You draw the curtain, and discover plainly the lustre and beauty of the same virtue, revealing simply, familiarly, and in particular, what it is, what acts should herein be practised, and descending always to particulars. 'I see now,' some one says, 'in what that virtue consists, the things with which it is concerned, and what are its acts ; that is good and very necessary, but, sir, how difficult it is ! and how can we acquire it ? I know not what I am obliged to do for this, in what manner I should conduct myself therein ; how should I attain this virtue though I know I have great need of it, and willingly would practise it if I had but the means ?' Give this man the means for it (which is the third point of the Method), and behold he is satisfied."

Next Saint Vincent shows that this Little Method is easy, natural, and suitable to all occasions and circumstances. "When one would urge a man to become President, what is it he employs



for that purpose? It is only necessary to present to him the advantages and the high honour which belong to that office. A President! Why, he is the chief man of the city; all yield to him the highest place and the footpath; there is no person who does not honour him; his authority gives him credit with the world. O sir, a President! He yields not to a bishop: even sovereigns defer to them, and hold them in great reverence. A President! He can oblige, can do a favour when it seems fit to him, acquire many friends, make himself esteemed everywhere, &c. . . . And thus he is told the other advantages of being President; and immediately you see him burning with the desire of obtaining that high dignity. But is he satisfied with this? Not at all; you must proceed still. What is the office of President? in what does it consist? What are its duties? You are the chief officer of justice of that high and honourable body; you are its head; you arrange the affairs; it is you who receive the verdict from the others and who pronounce the sentence. This is nearly all they show him. Now here is a man who desires to obtain the office of President, and who knows already in what it consists: but all this is to no purpose if the means of obtaining that post be not suggested to him. He would have cause of complaint against the meddler who should come to give him the desire of the office, without suggesting to him any means of getting it. If, however, he who supplies the advice gives also the means! Sir, you have such an income from that quarter, and so much money from the other; you shall draw from that place this sum, and from this place that other sum. For the rest, I know Mr. Such-a-one, who has that post to sell; further, Mr. So-and-so is intimate with me, and also his friend. I'll manage that he shall negotiate with him, and then we can also do this, that, and the other. This is what is well calculated to put a man on the high road to the Presidency. In all worldly matters, when we would persuade others, we lay down the means also; and this is the most effectual course, and to which it is impossible not to conform, if we have common sense. It is the same way in spiritual things."

Having shown in what the Little Method consists, and how natural it was, the saint proceeds to speak of its efficacy.

"A mission was given among the banditti, and these wretched persons were converted by the grace of God. A thing unheard of in our days! Behold what it has pleased God to effect through this poor and lowly Congregation, preaching according to the Little Method. Is it not a fact, Mr. Martin?

We are here in familiar conference ; tell us, if you please, how this has happened ?

“*Mr. Martin.* Yes, sir, it is so ; in the villages where missions have been given, the banditti, like the others, have come to confession. This generally happens in our missions.

“*Saint Vincent.* Oh, miraculous event ! the banditti converted by sermons delivered in the Little Method.

“More recently,” continued the saint, “a mission was given in a certain seaport town. A ship was wrecked on the coast ; the merchandise and other things with which the vessel was freighted were cast on the shore. The whole town and its environs flocked together there, and seized on everything they could carry away. The mission having been given according to the Little Method, it caused restitution to be made to the poor merchants of what had been stolen. They determined to restore all. Some returned bales of goods, others pieces of cloth, sums of money ; and the rest, not having wherewith to make immediate restitution, bound themselves to do so afterwards. Behold, gentlemen, the effects of the Little Method. Find me a parallel to this in that far-fetched style, in that elaborate plan, and in that vain show of elocution. Hardly a single individual is known to be converted in many Advents and Lents by such preaching.

“Among ourselves, gentlemen, what success have you not had everywhere that you preached according to the Little Method ? What conversions have you not seen ? The man and woman who lived in infamy have come to you. ‘Ah ! sir,’ they say, ‘we abandon our wicked ways. From this moment we are separated for ever. I promise you I shall never see her again.’ Oh ! what is this ? What is this ? The animosities, the inveterate enmities for which it seemed there was no remedy, the greatest discords, have they not been appeased by the efficacy which God has given to your sermons, delivered according to the Little Method ? O God ! what fruit, what advancements have been produced everywhere, and how much greater would they be if I, wretch that I am, had not impeded them by my sins ! O Saviour ! forgive this miserable sinner who mars all your designs.”

The pompous method, the saint used to say, not only produced no fruit, but injured those who used it by fostering thoughts of pride and vanity.

“What is the meaning of all this vain show ? Is it the

preacher's wish to prove that he is a great orator, a deep theologian? Strange thing! he takes a bad way of doing so. Perhaps he will be esteemed by some persons who know little about the matter; but to gain the esteem of the wise, and the reputation of being a very eloquent man, you must know the secret of enforcing that which you would wish your hearers to embrace, and of dissuading them from that which they are obliged to avoid. Now this does not consist in using choice words, in rounding your periods, in expressing in an uncommon manner subtle ideas, and in uttering your discourses in an elevated tone, like a declaimer, which passes over people's heads. Such preachers, can they obtain their ends? Do they forcibly persuade their audience to love piety? Are the people touched and moved to repentance? Far from it, far from it; and yet such are the pretensions of these orators: to acquire a reputation, to make people say: 'Really that man has a good delivery, he is truly eloquent, what fine ideas he has! and how beautifully he expresses them!' There is the whole fruit of their sermons. They go up then into the pulpit, not to preach God, but themselves; they employ (oh, what a crime!) a thing so holy as the Word of God to feed and pamper their own vanity. O Divine Saviour!

"But it is said, this method is good no doubt, but there are others equally good. We see many learned and eminent preachers who are ignorant of our method, yet they fail not to produce great fruit and to preach very well. Undoubtedly, God uses what means He pleases to promote His glory; He can make of these stones children to Abraham. But, with all that, how many conversions do we see by such methods? We have experience of ours, but concerning these fashionable methods you have experience to the contrary. They pass lightly over, do nothing but graze, touch nothing but the surface, and make a little noise. What is all that in comparison to the fruit we see spring from our Little Method.

"Be not under the impression, gentlemen, that this Little Method is only for the Congregation, for the vulgar, the peasantry; it is, indeed, most excellent for the people, but it is also very efficacious for the most enlightened audience, for cities, even Paris. In the mission which was given at Saint-Germain, people hastened there from all parts, from all quarters of this great city; people were there from all parishes, and persons of rank, even doctors of divinity. No sermons were preached to all that vast assembly except according to the

Little Method. The Lord Bishop of Boulogne, who was the principal speaker, never had any other; and what fruit did it not produce? O God! what fruit! General confessions were made, just as in the villages, with great benediction. Now, God be praised! were there ever seen so many converted by all those refined sermons? These fly over the house-tops. All the conversion made by them is that the audience say: 'Yes, this man has profound thoughts, he says fine things.'

"But let us say more: the Little Method is suited to the court; twice already has it appeared there, and let me say, it has been well received. The Lord Bishop of Alet was the principal speaker. By the grace of God all opposition was surmounted by the Little Method, and the second time, when one of our priests, M. Luytre, spoke, thanks be to God! there was no opposition. O wretch that I am! I dare to say it, the Little Method was triumphant there.

"I think, therefore, there is nothing to prevent us from adopting this method of preaching. Is it the pleasure? But this enables us to preach with more satisfaction than all other methods. What greater pleasure in effect can a preacher have than to see his audience come to him in tears, as has happened often to yourselves? Is it not true that often you see your audience weep, and that when you would retire, it is necessary or you to steal away, since they run after you? Is it not true, gentlemen? Tell us, I beseech you, why this happens, and if it be not so? Yes, sir, a person knows not how to depart in order to escape from the crowd. O Saviour! they give us the same praise that they gave to Jesus Christ. 'Happy,' they say to the missionaries, 'the wombs that bore you!' When the missionaries depart they cry after them: 'Happy, the breasts that gave you suck!' What more have they said of the Son of God? They address all these praises, and much more that would be tedious to relate, to the missionaries, but only when they use the Little Method.

"But this method is low! What will be said of me for always preaching in the same manner? What shall I be taken for? Every one shall despise me, I shall lose my character. . . . You shall lose your character! Oh! in preaching as Jesus Christ you shall lose your reputation! What! to speak of God as the Son of God spoke of Him is to lose one's reputation! Oh! Jesus Christ, the Word of the Father, had then no reputation! Oh, what a blasphemy! One day I asked M. N——: "Tell me, sir, if you please, how acted Saint Vincent Ferrer,

who converted so many persons, and who attracted crowds from all parts, so that a convoy of provisions had to attend him ? ” He answered me : ‘ It is so ; that illustrious saint preached in simplicity, familiarly, making himself well understood by all.’ O simplicity, thou art all-persuasive ! Long live simplicity, which converts all ; long live the Little Method, which is the most excellent, and by which we can acquire more honour, convincing the understanding, without all that clamour which does nothing but weary the audience. O gentlemen ! so true is this, that if a man would pass for a good preacher in the churches of Paris, and at court, it is necessary for him to preach thus, and with no airs. Of such a preacher it is said : this man does wonders ; he preaches in missionary style, he preaches apostolically. To preach well, they say, it is necessary to preach as we do, and M. N—— told me that in the end it should come to this. O my God ! Thou hast given then this grace to the little and despicable Congregation, to inspire a method which all would fain follow ; we return Thee thanks for it with all our strength.”<sup>1</sup>

Thus it was that Saint Vincent stigmatised false eloquence, and prepared the way for the simple, natural, and convincing style of oratory, of which Bossuet is the grand model.

The saint was equally anxious that the catechetical instructions should be most carefully attended to. “ All are agreed that the fruit of a mission depends on these instructions. A person of quality told me lately that our missionaries prepare their sermons well, but not the instructions. In the name of God, sir, let this fact be known in your house.” This defect was quickly seen to in Saint-Lazare. Lessons were given to the young students, and henceforth they went on the missions well prepared to give these instructions. They assembled the children of the parish, carefully instructed them, and at the end of the mission they all made their first communion.

The mission usually concluded with the erection of the Association of Charity, either for the men or women of the parish. Saint Vincent wished that the missionaries should found this association, even in the smallest parish, for he believed it was the best means of preserving the fruits of a mission.

Labours so wisely carried out by men so humble and devoted to the poor, could not but excite widespread admiration. As the saint himself bears testimony, the people followed the missionaries, and in some cases it was necessary even to depart by night to escape an ovation. Protestants were also converted in great

<sup>1</sup> “ Conferences.”

numbers ; for Saint Vincent strongly impressed upon his missionaries that charity was to be their only weapon, that they should attack the error, but not the person, and that in troubled times they should never even allude to politics—wise counsel and suitable for all times.

Among the missions of this period none caused greater commotion than the one given in Saint-Germain-en-Laye. The court was there at the time, and for that reason Saint Vincent, always an enemy of display, wished that the mission should be given by others. Louis XIII. expressed a command, and thus left no option to our saint. The ladies attached to the court attended, and all were struck with the simplicity and humility of the missionaries, especially in their preaching.

“The mission of Saint-Germain,” writes Saint Vincent, “ended most successfully, though in the beginning there were some difficulties. The King told M. Pavillon that he was thoroughly satisfied. Those who at first created the opposition, afterwards became the most fervent.”

At the conclusion of a mission it often happened that, in order to maintain the good effects produced, the lord of the manor offered Saint Vincent a site for one of his houses, and others guaranteed annuities. Thus almost every year a new house was established : Toul in 1635 ; La Rose in 1637 ; Richelieu, Luçon, and Troy in 1638 ; Annecy in 1639 ; Crécy in 1641 ; Rome in 1642 ; Marseilles, Cahors, Sedan, and Montmirail in 1643, &c. It is interesting to read Saint Vincent’s letters in connection with the establishment of a new house, and to notice how carefully he wishes the future to be provided for, how the contract should be well made, and the building itself and ground attached to it be in good order. Saint Vincent dealt with every matter as a man of experience. What is particularly striking is the care he took to select a good superior for each new house, and the admirable directions he gave him. But of this we shall speak later on.

Saint Vincent ardently desired that his Congregation should be approved by the King and the Pope. M. de Gondi was commissioned to arrange the matter with the former, and obtained letters-patent from Louis XIII., but in consequence of certain intrigues, Parliament did not ratify them for four years afterwards—1631. M. du Coudray, one of our saint’s first disciples, was sent to Rome, but here also difficulties had to be overcome.

The constitution of the new Congregation presented this difficulty, that its members were not to be bound by solemn

vows, and this was altogether a new departure. Simple vows of poverty, chastity, obedience, and stability in the Congregation were merely required. In the opinion of theologians this did not constitute the members of the Congregation of the Mission religious, and this was what Saint Vincent de Paul intended. His priests were to wear the ordinary soutane ; they were not to be bound to chant the divine office, or to any particular penances, but merely those fasts prescribed by the Church on all the faithful. On the other hand, they were required to practise complete separation from the world, a life of humility, mortification, and devotedness to the poor. All this was quite a new and bold step, and raised for a time, at least, much opposition in Rome.

"O sir !" writes Saint Vincent to M. du Coudray, "I am greatly astonished at what you tell me, but I fear only my own sins, for sooner or later our plan will succeed."

To those who said there was no need of any more missionaries, the saint replied: "Alas ! the country is large, and there are thousands perishing. All the secular and religious bodies are not enough to meet this misfortune. If we are prevented from coming to the aid of those poor people, we must only pray and do penance for our sins."<sup>1</sup>

Ultimately, Alexander VII. summoned the cause to his own tribunal, and having had it carefully examined by a commission composed of cardinals, published the brief of approbation on September 22, 1655.

Having thus secured the future of his Congregation by this double approbation of the Pope and the King, Saint Vincent next set about establishing a regular novitiate, where those who aspired to join might test their vocation in solitude and silence, and under wise directors.

Not all who entered the seminary—for so the saint wished it to be called rather than the novitiate—were destined for the ecclesiastical state. There were also lay-brothers, who took the same vows and had the same spiritual exercises as the others, but whose duty it was to do manual work, and to assist the priests in this way on the missions.

Saint Vincent placed M. de la Salle at the head of the seminary, and gave him instructions which to this day have remained the rule of conduct of the Priests of the Mission. They are reduced to three points, and it is difficult to know what to admire most.

<sup>1</sup> "Letters," vol. i. p. 65.

1. Never ask any one to enter the Congregation.

"Ah! gentlemen, be on your guard, when you meet those who come here to make a retreat, never to say anything which might induce them to enter the Company. It is for God to call them, and to give them the first thought of doing so. Even when they tell you they have an idea of joining, don't take it upon yourselves to decide for them, but exhort them to think the matter over, to frequently ask God for light in prayer, for it is a most important step. Represent to them the difficulties which they shall have according to nature, that they should be slow in making up their minds, and be ready to suffer and labour much for God. After this, if they still continue in their resolution, let them confer with the Superior about their vocation. Leave God to act, gentlemen, and let you humbly, patiently, and with the greatest submission, await the orders of Divine Providence. Believe me, if the Company acts thus, God will bless it."

2. Never retain any one who wishes to leave.

"If you see," the saint continues, "that they wish to go elsewhere, and to serve God in some other order or community, O God, do not prevent them! otherwise we might justly fear the indignation of God. Tell me, I beg of you, if the Company had not acted in this spirit up to the present, would the Carthusians and other communities have sent so many young men to make a retreat here when they asked to join them? A young man who wishes to become a Carthusian is sent here to learn God's will in the spiritual exercises of a retreat, and you endeavour to persuade him to remain here! What else is such conduct, gentlemen, but to wish to retain a person in a Congregation to which God does not call him, and for which even he himself has no desire. Would not this be sufficient to bring down the wrath of God on the Company? O poor Congregation of the Mission, what a pitiable state you should fall to, if you came to this! But with the help of God, you have in the past, and will in the future, keep far from such a degradation."

3. This was not enough: if a person decided to abandon the world, and was hesitating about the choice of a community, he should be urged to join the most fervent. If he selected the Congregation, Saint Vincent exclaimed: "O sir, we are only poor folk, not to be compared with other holy communities! Go to one of them, you will be incomparably better off there than with us." This certainly is divine; here we feel the Spirit of God.



Such sentiments, far from repelling them, only served to attract noble souls, and soon the seminary was not able to contain all that applied to be admitted. Now that he had obtained the approbation of the Congregation, and provided it with a seminary to recruit new members, Saint Vincent thought he might retire. Of what use was he? He was only an obstacle, by the number and enormity of his sins, as he used to say. He resolved, then, to resign. With this in view, he convened a general assembly on October 13, 1642. Almost all the Superiors were there. Before the whole assembly the saint went on his knees, and having asked pardon for all the scandal which he had given, he tendered his resignation, and begged them to elect his successor. He immediately left the room, merely saying that he ratified beforehand, their election, and that he would obey, just as the least among them, the new Superior-General.

The first impression of all present was of admiration and astonishment. When they came to themselves again, some went out to find Saint Vincent, and beg of him to return and resume his place at their head. The saint was found prostrate in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, begging of God to enlighten the assembly in its choice of a new Superior. When he was told the decision, he remained for a moment motionless, and then turning round, said, "I am no longer Superior, let them nominate another."

When this answer reached the assembly, the whole body rose and went to where our saint was kneeling. As they approached they heard the humble remonstrances of the Father to the tender and respectful solicitations of his children. Seeing the saint determined, the missionaries at last said, "Do you absolutely wish us then to proceed to elect a new Superior?"—"That is your duty, and I conjure you to do it."—"Very well, then, we will do so." In a short time they returned and announced to him that they had re-elected him for life, and would always do so, as long as God preserved him. Saint Vincent was, so to speak, caught in his own trap. He tried to disengage himself, but seeing all his efforts useless, he submitted.

"At least, gentlemen and my brothers," he said, "pray for this miserable wretch! This is the greatest act of obedience I can perform." Then the missionaries renewed their vow of obedience, and testified their gratitude towards him.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Maynard, vol. i. p. 387.

Scarcely elected, Saint Vincent profited by the presence of so many Superiors to confer with them upon certain measures till then not definitely decided. "We have just held an assembly," he writes, "in which we examined the rules which we had prepared, settled upon the principal ones, and deputed Messrs. Portail, Du Coudray, Horgny, and Lambert, to examine and decide on the rest. We have given the order which should be followed at the General Assemblies, and settled what remained to be fixed in the Company. I shall send you all this that you may give us your opinion upon it. We have introduced nothing, or very little that is new, except to give Assistants to the General; so that I am now ready to die, when it shall please God."<sup>1</sup>

Fortunately his hour had not yet come. Although in his sixty-sixth year, he had still eighteen more to live, and those were destined to be the most active and fruitful years of his extraordinary life. Free on the side of his Congregation, with four great armies of charity at his command, and wearing on his brow an ever-increasing aureola of sanctity, we shall see Saint Vincent de Paul battle against misery, which every day assumed greater proportions, and triumph over it, at least as far as possible here below, especially in those sad times when it is aggravated by war, famine, and pestilence.

<sup>1</sup> "Letters," vol. i. p. 425.

## BOOK IV.

### SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL IN PRESENCE OF MISERY.

#### CHAPTER I.

##### THE SUFFERINGS OF LORRAINE.

1635-1642.

WHILE Saint Vincent was labouring to form the great armies of charity of which we have been speaking, war was raging, followed, as usual then, by famine and pestilence. The most beautiful provinces of France were being devastated : Lorraine, Champagne, Burgundy, Picardy, Anjou and Orleans. Civil war soon increased the misery, till it reached the gates of Paris and the very faubourgs of the capital.

This was the origin of the war. France had reached, under Henry IV., a crisis in her history. That grand religious unity which for centuries the Church had laboured to establish, Protestantism had broken asunder. It had successively torn away England, Sweden, Denmark, Holland, and a part of Germany. On the other hand, thanks to the genius of Charles V., Austria had reunited under her all that remained of that unity : Hungary, Bohemia, the Low Countries, Bavaria, Spain, Naples and Milan. Thus, Europe was divided into Protestant and Catholic nations, and France had now to make her choice. How was she to regain her ancient grandeur ? Two plans presented themselves to her, the first that of the saints, the second that of the politicians. To unite with Austria and the Catholic nations, to weaken the influence and power of the Protestant, to assist towards the restoration of Catholicism, and thus towards the re-establishment of the religious unity of Europe—this was the plan of Cardinal de Bérulle, of Saint Vincent de Paul, of M. Olier, and of Blessed Peter Fourier. In this scheme, it is true, France should not at once have taken her place among the first European Powers, but assuredly she should have done so later on, and have gained for herself and Europe the blessing of religious unity. It was a project, too, that put in practice the

Gospel teaching: "*Seek first the kingdom of God, and His justice, and all these things shall be added unto you.*" To-day, after the lapse of three centuries, there can be no doubt that France should have gained immensely by adopting this policy of the saints.

The second scheme was altogether different: to humble, at any cost, the house of Austria, which was becoming a menace to France, to support the Protestant nations, to accord to them rights, privileges and legal recognition, but on condition that they would in return aid France, and thus build the supremacy of France on the ruins of Austria. This was the project of Henry IV., of Richelieu, of Mazarin, and of Louis XIV. It succeeded admirably, making France the first nation of the world, and winning for its advocates, notwithstanding all their faults, a glory which has not yet faded. Soon, however, the weakness of this second plan appeared. The Catholic nations have not since risen from their humiliation, the Protestant have not ceased to grow in power, and to-day France is menaced by those very nations the foundations of whose glory she unwisely and too selfishly helped to lay.

Henry IV. died, having adopted this policy. Richelieu put it into execution, bringing to his task all the courage and determination of his character, and Mazarin, with his Italian astuteness, completed the work. To weaken Austria, Richelieu began with two master-strokes. He advocated the claims of Gustavus-Adolphus to the Protestant throne of Sweden. This was a young hero, whose genius the Cardinal recognised, and he placed him as a menace on Austria's right flank. Looking on the other side, he saw on the throne of Lorraine the Duke Charles IV., and he endeavoured through him to threaten Austria's left flank. But Charles IV. had neither the genius nor courage of Gustavus-Adolphus. He became afraid, and asked to remain neutral, but obtaining nothing from Richelieu, he first secretly and then publicly sided with Austria. Richelieu was only biding his time, and in 1633 pounced upon him like a vulture on his prey. Charles called Austria to his aid, and thus began that terrible war which ended, no doubt, in victory for France, but only after covering the land with blood and ruins.

This war has two histories: the one external, the other internal. The first recounts the glory and the triumphs, the second the secret sorrows and the odious crimes. It is the latter that we are about to contemplate, that we may place in bold relief

the divine tenderness, the inexhaustible generosity, and extraordinary wisdom of our saint.

War in the seventeenth century was very different from war in the nineteenth. In place of organised and disciplined troops, there were hired mercenaries who lived on the enemy. The great, the only law was to strike terror into the inhabitants. Men were killed, women outraged, harvests destroyed, fruit-trees cut down, and whole districts laid waste, in order to starve out the enemy. Thus the French acted even in their own country, and how much worse in this respect were the Germans, Croats, Hungarians and Bohemians ! At that time there were in Germany, Hungary and along the Danube, men who hired themselves out to fight, desperate characters, ready to kill or be killed, wild adventurers, ever eager to pillage and carry everywhere the horrors of war.

It was to these men that Austria turned, and from 1633 to 1636 they continued to pour in upon France. At first Waldstein, a sullen and savage character, secured a hundred thousand soldiers by promising them free scope for pillage and debauchery in exchange for their obedience to his orders. He occupied in turn Worms, Frankfort, the environs of Strasbourg, and finally stood before the gates of Metz. His lieutenants, as fearless as himself, went still farther. Jean de Werth came within a short distance of Notre-Dame, and the cruelties of his soldiers spread terror all over France. Piccolomini, at the head of an army of Poles, Croats and Hungarians, entered Picardy, while Gallas laid waste Burgundy.

France, thus invaded on three sides simultaneously, made heroic efforts with an army admirable on the battle-field, but not better disciplined than that of the enemy, and adopting the same tactics of wholesale destruction. Under such circumstances what was to become of the poor ? The districts through which the troops did not pass were not even secure. " Large bodies of infantry and cavalry went about cutting down the harvest to sell it, plundering every village that would not pay a large ransom, and demanding all this as a return for military service." <sup>1</sup> To be in the vicinity of a garrison was even a greater danger. The soldiers, generally at night, emerged from their retreat, and galloped through the country till they reached a village, which they pillaged and sometimes even burned. Having secured their booty, they galloped back as swift as Arabs, and were gone before the neighbouring villages were

<sup>1</sup> Maynard, vol. iv. p. 172.



aware of the attack.<sup>1</sup> Thus for fifteen years the poor country-people were persecuted by their friends and enemies, and perhaps even more harshly by the former than by the latter.

When war was carried on in this manner, when soldiers ransacked the country, trampling the young crops under their horses' feet, cutting down the fruit-trees, and burning the mills, famine was the necessary consequence of war. It broke out in Lorraine in 1631, and in 1635 it was at its height. Forty francs a bushel would be given for corn, and yet it was not to be had. The poor died of hunger. In 1637 the people were glad to eat carcasses, and villages once thriving were now deserted. In 1640, four to five thousand poor entered Metz, and soon the place was strewn with dead and dying. Besides hunger and disease, wolves, attracted by the stench of the corpses, entered the towns and villages in full daylight, and devoured women and children. In May 1640, Pont-à-Mousson reckoned between four and five hundred poor dying of hunger. Destitution was beginning to drive the people to acts of cruelty, and the weak were sometimes made the victims of the strong. A witness relates that without divine assistance he could not have borne the sight, so ghastly was the appearance of the unfortunate people. A mother and her three children were seen roasting a snake and preparing to eat it. In 1642 the misery was so extreme in Lorraine that bread was never remembered to have been so dear. A similar state of things existed at Guise, where the poor were dying of hunger, and Saint-Quentin was no better. In a single house two widows, each with four children, lay on the floor without food or covering. The number who came to take refuge from the soldiers was so great that the citizens, not able to support them, determined to put them outside of the city walls.

At Laon, Verdun, and Mézières, guards were placed to refuse admittance to any who came. At Bazoches the soldiers had pillaged everything, and at Fismes and Brêmes the plague-stricken people filled the streets and houses, and were without any assistance, food or clothing; the dead and dying lay side by side, even infants on the breasts of their dead mothers. At Capelle and Catelet food was not to be had for money, so we may imagine the consequence. Laon, Vervins, and La Fère presented a dreadful spectacle. Some of the wretched victims lay covered with sores on their heads, their feet, or over their whole bodies, which gave forth an insupportable stench and

<sup>1</sup> M. E. Fleury, p. 87.

rendered the sight unbearable. At Lesquielle bodies were found in a house where wolves had entered and devoured their prey. In 1651, at Rheims and Réthel, the harvest had been destroyed, no seed sown for the coming year, famine universal, and dead bodies covered the streets. The people who survived looked more like ghosts than men. At Guise the carcasses of dogs and horses were eaten, and two children were seen at Mareuil, near Soissons, devouring their dead parents. At Saint-Quentin the people tore the bark from the trees, ate the clay, and in their agony of despair gnawed at their very selves. In Beauce two thousand two hundred were without food or clothing. Bread was not to be found in even ten of the best houses in Berry. The highest families were no better off than the lowest. Along the streets and in the fields were the wretched victims to be seen, seeking, like a herd of cattle, something to eat. At Étampes more than four hundred poor lay prostrate in the streets ; at Meung, two hundred ; at Beaugency, five hundred ; and at Montargis, two thousand. At Lorris a mother killed her two little children for food, and afterwards strangled herself. "I have been for three weeks," writes an eyewitness, "in these provinces, and the people are dying by the hundred. They are buried in threes and fours at a time. The dead and dying lie side by side on the highway. A morsel of bread is fought for, and men and women seize upon the dead carcass of a horse for food. It is estimated that without immediate assistance, in the province of Orleans and of Blois alone, more than twenty thousand will die."

Famine, however, was not the worst consequence of these wars ; it was pestilence. The mercenary soldiers coming from the East, the Bohemians, Croats, and Hungarians, brought the infection with them, and left it after them. The thousands of men killed and not buried, the sick imprisoned in their houses and dying of hunger, and the carcasses of horses helped to spread and keep alive the fearful malady. It attacked Lorraine, Burgundy, and Champagne in 1631, and returned again in 1633 and 1635. At Saint-Quentin in 1636, three thousand died in six months. About October of the same year the plague broke out at Beauvais and Compiègne, causing terrible destruction. In the little town of Marle, within five months, more than four hundred people died. In 1637 it visited Lorraine for the seventh time, passing from it to Burgundy, where at Auxonne alone were reckoned three thousand five hundred deaths. At Palaiseau there was not a sufficient number even to bury the

dead, and Étampes was strewn with dead bodies. Normandy, which had escaped the war, did not escape the pestilence. At Rouen more than seventeen thousand persons were carried off in a very short time. "The bells," says Rotrou, "sounded for the twenty-second person who died to-day." Paris was no better off. Twenty-two doctors and a number of priests and religious were soon victims of the scourge. From Paris it passed to the country round Bordeaux, Bas-Languedoc, Avignon, Toulouse, Marseilles, Nîmes, and again to Burgundy and Lorraine.

What augmented the evil was, that no aid was to be found. Where could it come from? From the King, from the Government? No doubt Louis XIII. and Anne of Austria, as we shall see, were working wonders. But the taxes being badly collected, and the necessity of maintaining the army, prevented the Government from giving assistance. On the contrary, the Government increased the disorders by endeavouring to force payment. The collectors went about demanding money, even at the cost of violence. What could not be paid by some was imposed on others, who in their turn necessarily became poor. In 1634, in Normandy the people were constrained to sell their very clothes to pay the taxes, and the women from sheer shame absented themselves from church.<sup>1</sup> In Burgundy the taxes were eight times what they had been in previous years. On all sides the people were in revolt, and the collectors were powerless to secure payment. Clermont, Brioude, Aurillac were in a state of open rebellion, and Pontoise had its prisons full of debtors. All over France it was the same. In 1646 there were 23,000 prisoners for debt. To add to the evil, while the State demanded payment of taxes, it did not pay its own debts. This drove the most law-abiding to violence, and they threatened open pillage and plunder.

If the State, thus encumbered and practically ruined, could neither pay nor compel payment, and had become incapable of giving assistance, what could the clergy do? Far less. They, more than anybody, had suffered, and the land, now for more than twenty years devastated by the soldiery, yielded no harvest. Tithes were not paid. Most of the mercenaries that had invaded Lorraine, Burgundy, Picardy and Champagne were Lutherans, and madly enraged against priests and churches. In Lorraine the priests, after even selling the sacred vessels for the support of their flocks, had at last to abandon their churches and wander

<sup>1</sup> Michelet, *Hist. de France*, vol. i. p. 150.



abroad for food. A canon of Verdun writes: "The distress has forced me to leave my church and seek a livelihood with the labour of my hands." In Picardy the Lutherans destroyed and burned the churches, till no trace remained of those noble monuments. The barbarians were delighted to expose priests to the mockery of the multitude, and often they murdered them in their houses or at the foot of the altar. At Fismes and Braine the churches were profaned and the sacred vessels and ornaments carried off. At Bazoches the Blessed Sacrament was trampled under foot, and in more than twenty-five churches in that district no worship could be held. At Ribemont, La Fère, and Vervins, most of the priests were dead or dying, and the churches burned. In the diocese of Laon alone there were a hundred parishes where all worship was suspended. The Archbishop of Rheims urgently advocated that his province should be released from the payments of taxes. At Châlons-sur-Marne the churches were likewise destroyed, and mass could not be offered. Everywhere it was the same, and Burgundy was as badly off as Champagne and Lorraine.

The religious of both sexes were treated not less harshly than the priests. The savage soldiery delighted in burning monasteries, pillaging convents, outraging nuns. They went as far even as to disinter the dead, as in the case of Prior Dupont. Those religious who escaped died of hunger. At Saint-Quentin the Franciscans lived for many years on herbs, and at La Fère the Benedictines were ill from hunger. The religious like the rest required alms, food and clothing, and that too for thirty years. In 1640 no less than eleven hundred religious received support.

What increased the misery was that the rich gentry had passed away. All the castles were plundered, and the land had not been sown. Even the richest could not afford to give five sous in charity, nay, they begged like the poorest. A nobleman, who asked something for his sick daughter, was told, assistance was only given to the poor. "Alas!" he replied, "I am of that number, for a cup of water is all that my daughter has had these two days."

Volumes would hardly suffice to convey an adequate idea of the desolation of these thirty years, and that in the fairest provinces of France.

The large manufactories closed one after the other. The drapery works of Lille, Armentières and Elbeuf went first, and were soon followed by the glass-works of Lorraine and

Burgundy. The woollen industry of Picardy, having held out for some time, had in the end to yield, and the wine district of Champagne and Burgundy was likewise a failure. The hospitals were unable, because of debt, to receive the poor applicants. The villages were deserted. In Burgundy, of two hundred and twelve towns and villages, twenty were entirely destroyed, and thirty had only a few persons left. Lorraine was worse still. Bonissoncourt was a desert, and so too were Pierre-ville, Paray, Saint-Césaire, and all the villages of Vermois. Such was the state of most of the province of Lorraine.

When we search the civil and ecclesiastical records of the time, and seek the person who brought aid to this vast population suffering at once the horrors of war, famine, and pestilence, one name, and one name only, is to be found, the name of Saint Vincent de Paul. We are now about to see what a single man can do when possessed of and inspired by true charity.

## CHAPTER II.

### SAINT VINCENT'S FIRST EFFORTS TO COMBAT MISERY.

1642-1648

IT was in itself a grand sight to witness a poor priest hidden away in the faubourgs of Paris, a man of sixty-six years, moved at the thought of the sufferings of provinces so far away as Burgundy, Champagne, and Lorraine. Who among the court, the clergy, or the élite of Paris were thinking of these horrors? Even the holiest persons, absorbed in their own works, do not appear to have turned their attention in this direction. Saint Vincent alone did so. But what is still more admirable is the success which attended his endeavours. The great and noble efforts of our saint, irreligious historians have endeavoured to lessen. Some pass them over in silence, while others speak of them only to minimise them. "We have witnessed," writes Michelet, "the inadequacy of the aid brought by that excellent man, Vincent de Paul."<sup>1</sup> No doubt he did not dry every eye, he did not fill every mouth, but his hands were still full when the coffers of the State were exhausted, and we shall see every province rise up one after the other and proclaim him their benefactor, their deliverer, and the father of his country.<sup>2</sup>

What was wanted above everything else was money. Fortunately Saint Vincent had the purse of the Ladies' Assembly at his disposal, and this he generously drew upon. We have few details of these first charities from 1633 to 1639. Nothing was written about them, as it was thought the misery could not last. In 1639 so much was given away in the early part of the year that the wants of the people could no longer be satisfied in the latter half. In 1640 better provision was made. Five hundred livres a month were given to the following towns: Nancy, Verdun, Metz, Toul, Bar-le-Duc, and in this way two thousand five hundred a month or thirty thousand livres a year were distributed. Soon Saint-Michel and Saint-Quentin were added. At Verdun for three years bread was distributed to five or six hundred poor. At Saint-Quentin

<sup>1</sup> Michelet, *Hist. de France*, vol. xii, p. 280

<sup>2</sup> Feillet, p. 248.

nine hundred livres were given away every week, that is, over forty-six thousand livres a year. It was the same at Ribemont and La Fère. In 1650 it was necessary even to increase this grant, and it reached seventy-two thousand livres a year. In January 1651, Lorraine was receiving three thousand livres a week. About March, Saint Vincent wrote : "It is incredible with what difficulty these ladies sustained the burden of such expense ; it reached one hundred and eighty thousand livres a year. According as we advance, the expense increases with the number of provinces that are invaded." At Saint-Quentin nine hundred livres a week were not sufficient, and RétHEL and Marle received sixty thousand livres a month. Saint Vincent computed that Laon received, from 15th July 1650 to 11th July 1657, no less a sum than three hundred and sixty-seven thousand five hundred livres. Moreover, that amount does not include clothing and church furniture, which would raise the total very considerably. Large sums, too, were given in Burgundy, Lorraine, and the environs of Paris, of which he does not speak. When this terrible war was ended, Mgr. François Hébert, Bishop of Agen, computed that Saint Vincent de Paul gave in charity the enormous sum of twelve million livres, that is to say, nearly one million pounds sterling of our actual money. Saint Vincent, who always gave the honours to others, says in praise of this fact : "O ladies, does not the recital of these things move you? Are you not touched with gratitude for God's goodness towards you and those afflicted people? Providence deigned to make use of some ladies in Paris to succour the desolated provinces. Does not this strike you as new? No country possesses a precedent for it ; no, it was a heroism reserved for you, and for those who have gone from amongst you, to receive an ample reward for their exalted charity "

When the exchequer of the Ladies of Charity was exhausted, as happened from time to time, the saint struck on the bold enterprise of appealing to the great ladies of Paris : the Duchess d'Aiguillon, niece of Richelieu, the Presidente de Herse, Mlle. de Lamoignon, Mme. de Bretonvilliers, and last, but by no means least, Mlle. le Gras, on whose purse Saint Vincent confidently and constantly relied. He applied to the Queen of Poland, who sent him twelve thousand francs, and finally he appealed to the Queen Regent and was not refused. For want of money she sent her jewels. The first time it was a diamond valued at seven thousand livres, and again ear-rings, which were

sold by the Ladies of Charity for eighteen thousand livres. Asking, like a Christian princess, that her gift might be kept secret, Saint Vincent replied: "Your Majesty must pardon me if I obey not in this. I cannot conceal so noble an act of charity. It is well, madame, that all Paris, nay, all France, should know it, and I feel bound to publish it everywhere I can."<sup>1</sup>

Saint Vincent de Paul did not stop here. There were others who had more money than the Queen; there was the public. Our saint conceived the courageous idea of using the press in favour of charity. His missionaries, spread over the scene of war, sent most touching accounts of the sufferings. These the saint had published, and distributed at the church doors. Soon they became periodicals, appearing every month, and read with such eagerness that the first numbers had to be reprinted. "God has so blessed this undertaking," writes the saint, "that many have largely contributed towards the assistance of the suffering." "These accounts have been spread all over the kingdom, and are undoubtedly the greatest success."

A paper even was founded called the *Magazine of Charity*, with the express object of promoting a great movement of charity.

While working at this undertaking the saint had also applied to the Archbishop to issue a pastoral to be read in all the churches of Paris, and which, as a matter of fact, produced wonderful fruit. He likewise wrote to all the bishops with whom he was acquainted, and finally brought out himself a little work entitled *Instructions How to Assist the Poor*. Writing was little to his taste, but this book, filled with quotations from the Holy Scripture and the Fathers, was admirable, and gave birth to many others, including one by Antoine Godeau, Bishop of Grasse, and another, *The Charitable Christian*, by the Jesuit Bonnefons. Thus by the example of a single man, those throughout France who were not afflicted themselves came to the assistance of their suffering fellow-countrymen.

To collect money was not enough; it was necessary to bring it to the afflicted people, and lastly, to distribute it prudently. For this object Saint Vincent had his two armies, the Priests of the Mission and the Sisters of Charity. He sent them in groups with orders to divide on the battlefield, and to labour in the most afflicted districts. Soon they were to be seen at Metz, Verdun, Nancy, Pont-à-Mousson, Bar-le-Duc, Saint-Michel and later at Étampes, Palaiseau and Richelieu. The grateful people

<sup>1</sup>Maynard, vol. iv. p. 233.

left in the records of their cities and towns an expression of their indebtedness to the saint. After a while he gathered the missionaries together again, and placed ten or fifteen under a superior in different places. To these he sent visitors, who made a report of the state of the district, so that charity might be given proportionate to the need. He acted in the same manner with the Sisters of Charity, sending them in twos and threes to the most dangerous places, encouraging the weak, and praising those who died "sword in hand," as he used to say. In fine, he spared nothing to communicate to others the fire of charity, of which his own heart was a furnace.

The letters which he received from the missionaries were most depressing, but the saint's courage never faltered. Soon by his orders, after the experience of the first years, they adopted a regular plan of campaign to arrest the misery. This consisted of four points :—

1. To rescue those who were dying of starvation. For this end he instituted the work of cheap soup dinners. One is touched in reading the details into which he went.

"To feed a hundred poor, a large vessel was to be procured, containing five cans of water, in which was to be cut up twenty-five pounds of bread, two pounds of dripping (or of butter on days of abstinence), four pints of peas or other vegetables, and the whole cooked and distributed among the poor, according to their necessity."

These dinners, which saved thousands, were distributed by the Sisters of Charity. At Guise they were without the utensils necessary for making the soup, and for fifteen days sought in vain to establish the work. At first three hundred received this assistance, but soon the number increased to six and seven hundred, and included some of the highest families in the district. At Saint-Quentin the work was begun with what was required merely to feed two hundred, but after a few days there were fifteen hundred applicants. Besides soup, bread and meat was given at Laon, and at Bazoches the Sisters of Charity distributed soup and other assistance to no less than twelve hundred. They spent three thousand livres per week in supporting the poor of Rheims, Réthel, Boult-sur-Suippe, Sommepey and Donchery. They established six soup kitchens at Étampes, where there were crowds of poor and sick, without even a cup of water to quench their burning thirst. In the faubourgs of Paris, soup was given daily to ten thousand poor at a cost of sixteen hundred livres per month.

2. But of what avail was it to feed the hungry and to comfort the sick, as long as the town and villages, the highways and the fields, were strewn with dead bodies of men, women, and beasts, which gave forth an insupportable odour? A company of men was formed, with the missionaries at their head, to bury the dead. Terrible work, in which not a few missionaries and Sisters of Charity lost their lives! At Réthel close on two thousand bodies were buried in a very short time. One of the missionaries, Father Deschamps, was conspicuous by his labour in this work. At Étampes the missionaries relieved the streets of heaps of carcases which were infecting the air with a terrible stench, and afterwards disinfected the houses to render them fit dwellings. Here five of the missionaries and five of the Sisters of Charity died "sword in hand." At Etrechy, Villeneuve-Saint-Georges and Saint-Etienne, over three hundred sick were reduced to the last extremity, having no food, bedding, nor clothing. The first thing to be done was to bury the dead in order to arrest the spread of disease. At Saint-Etienne fifteen hundred lay dead on the battlefield, and these the missionaries buried. Fortunately the cold weather continued, for otherwise men could not be induced to undertake the work. On one occasion Saint Vincent had to assemble the Ladies of Charity and appeal to them for means to buy spades and pickaxes to dig graves, telling them that this was one of the most trying duties of the missionaries. At Villeneuve-Saint-Georges from twelve to fifteen hundred dead horses, not to speak of men and women, had to be interred. At Étampes the last moments of a Sister of Charity were signalised by an extraordinary act of heroism. "Some time ago," says Saint Vincent, "a sister on the point of death, seeing a poor person in need of being bled, rose from her death-bed to give assistance, and then died of the effort. Sister Mary Joseph was her name, and indeed it is well for her, she may be called a martyr of charity." There, too, occurred the death of our missionary, Father David. "Providence has called to Himself," writes Saint Vincent, "Father David, of whom it may be said in a short time *explevit tempora multa*. He was only ten or fifteen days assisting the poor and sick of Étampes when he fell a victim to his heroic work. Father Deschamps, who was with him, says that an angel from heaven could not do more for the afflicted people in hearing confessions, teaching catechism, and burying the dead. This noble soul when on the point of death, and thinking of the justice of God, exclaimed, 'No matter, Lord, should you even

condemn me, I shall not cease to love you, though in hell.' ” Some time before this Father de Montevit, a young missionary, died in the odour of sanctity at Bar-le-Duc, and of his death Father Roussel wrote : “ He died as I hope and pray I may die. Great honour was shown to his remains, but perhaps the greatest tribute was a crowd of six or seven hundred poor who followed them, torch in hand, to the grave. It was a debt of gratitude they owed him, for it was while relieving their misery he contracted the malady that took away his life. He heard confessions so constantly that, as far as I know, he never once even took the relaxation of a walk. We buried him near his confessional, where he met his death, and won in heaven the merit he now enjoys.”

3. While the dead were being interred and the air purified of its fetid odours, Saint Vincent, who thought of everything, was engaged in procuring seed for the land. He amassed provisions of corn, barley, beans, and distributed them everywhere. In 1650, within two months, he sent twenty thousand livres' worth of seed. The next year he spent almost forty thousand livres on the same object, experience having shown him it was the best form of charity.

4. But above this corporal misery, what was engaging the attention of Saint Vincent, his heroic disciples, and the noble Sisters of Charity, was the terrible danger and misery of souls. Worship was interrupted, churches plundered, thousands dying without the sacraments, and the young exposed to the most degrading examples of vice. Nothing was respected, and fallen nature was manifesting in all its hideousness its evil inclinations. Women and young girls fled to the woods and caves for shelter, but were pursued, torch in hand. They plunged into icy rivers, and hid themselves in lonely places to escape the brutal instincts of man. But all in vain. At Laon noble ladies and their daughters were banded with village and shepherd girls and driven into the camp to satiate the lust of a brutal soldiery. In vain they tried to escape and hide themselves in the woods. At Bazoches a witness writes :—“ I dare not relate the treatment to which the women are being subjected, but I shall say it to their praise, that they lose their lives to preserve their honour.”

When the war was ended, the women and young girls emerged, scantily clad, from their hiding places. This news went straight to the heart of Saint Vincent, who multiplied letters to his missionaries urging them to send these wretched females to Paris, where his charity secured for them situations.



The orphans were forwarded to him also, and he placed them in the hands of Mlle. le Gras. Saint-Quentin alone furnished no less than five hundred children under the age of seven, and Béthune and Berry as many more.

It would almost seem incredible, yet even the servants of the poor, the Priests of the Mission, and the noble Sisters of Charity were not secure in the midst of these terrible disorders. The money and other assistance which they were bringing to the sick and destitute were torn from them, and fierce violence used if they resisted. Saint Vincent informed the Queen-Regent of this, and she, resolving to protect these self-sacrificing men and women, issued a royal proclamation, which at once manifests the feebleness of the civil authority and the power of charity. This is the proclamation in its entirety :—

“BY ROYAL AUTHORITY.

“His Majesty having been informed that, in consequence of the pillaging of the enemy, the inhabitants of Picardy and Champagne are in a state of extreme misery, the churches desecrated, and the sacred ornaments sold to purchase sustenance for the poor, many noble-hearted persons in Paris have given large sums in charity, which are distributed among the most distressed districts by the Priests of the Mission and the Sisters of Charity. While doing this, however, the soldiery stationed in the parts where they go, have attacked them and robbed them of the assistance destined for the poor, so that without His Majesty's guarantee it is impossible for these noble workers to accomplish their design. His Majesty, desiring to do all he can for his afflicted people, wishes that all governors, military officers, both cavalry and infantry, as well French as foreign, be strictly commanded to prevent those actively engaged in the war from remaining on the frontier of Picardy and Champagne, or in any way impeding the Priests of the Mission in their charitable efforts to bring provisions to the afflicted people, so that full liberty may be given to them to labour where and as they please. His Majesty further commands that nothing shall be taken from these Priests of the Mission, or from the Sisters of Charity employed by them, under penalty of life. His Majesty takes them under his special protection, and expressly enjoins all civil and military authorities to immediately publish this royal ordinance, and promptly punish its contravention, so that an example may be made. His Majesty wishes that copies of this warrant, when duly collated, shall have the same force as the original.

“Given at Paris, Feb. 14, 1551.”

"How is it," remarks M. Feillet, "that so important a proclamation, and of which so many copies were made, has escaped the notice of all the biographers of the saint and of all the historians of the Fronde? We shall not inquire the reason, but merely say that it is the most important document we met in our researches. Let us weigh its several points: the acknowledgment of the misery, the barbarity of the soldiers, even going so far as to attack those who brought aid, and the solemn warning to the civil and military authorities to protect and assist the heroic men who were bringing assistance to the desolated provinces. We shall see later on what that protection was. By this warrant Saint Vincent de Paul ceases to act as a private individual, and becomes the royal Almoner-General, to whom is bequeathed the noblest gift of all—the power to do good. The humble peasant of the Landes by his charity became the strongest support of the kingdom in its hour of trial, and merited to be called by the Governor of Saint-Quentin the father of his country."<sup>1</sup>

This is not the only testimony that is borne to the work of Saint Vincent and his priests. Many other documents are to be found, but here we shall only mention a few of the principal ones.

In 1639 the Governor of Saint-Mihiel and the Vicar-General of Toul paid the highest tribute to the labours of the Priests of the Mission. In 1640, Metz, Verdun, and Pont-à-Mousson placed on record their debt of gratitude to Saint Vincent, and the following year Rheims, Lunéville, and Saint-Quentin publicly acknowledged all they owed to the Priests of the Mission and the Sisters of Charity.

These and many other public expressions of thanks prove that the charity of Saint Vincent de Paul was not forgotten. Moreover, when after fifty years the process of the saint's canonisation was begun, the bishops of the provinces which he had relieved were among the first to petition the Pope to place on the altars of the Church, him who had been their benefactor and protector, nay, the "Father of his country."

<sup>1</sup> Feillet, *La Misère au Temps de la Fronde*, p. 247.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE FRONDE—THE MISERY INCREASES—SAINT VINCENT'S EFFORTS TO RESTORE PEACE

1648—1652

AMID so much sorrow and bloodshed, Mazarin was beginning to realise the great scheme conceived by Henry IV. and pursued by Richelieu, namely, to break down Austria, and secure for France those fortresses on the Rhine which were necessary for her independence. Condé had gained a victory over the Spaniards at Lens on October 24, 1648, and the consequence was the treaty of Westphalia. By this treaty France acquired Metz, Toul and Verdun (which she had for a long time occupied), the whole of Alsace, leaving, however, Strasbourg free, but taking Brisach, Landau, and the right to garrison Philippsbourg. Thus France gained an entrance, if necessary, into Italy, and secured her north-eastern frontier.<sup>1</sup>

This treaty was dearly purchased. By it the independence and sovereignty of the Protestant nations were recognised, and heresy received that social existence which was subsequently to break down the Catholic unity of Europe. At the time the exaltation of France was the consolation for all this. The success on the north-eastern frontier was expected to be soon followed by similar success on the north-western, and under Condé and Turenne it was anticipated that the Low Countries should be compelled to yield that frontier of the Rhine, without which France, if defeated, might see her enemy under the walls of Paris. Thus free on the north, Navarre, Roussillon, and even Catalonia, were to be held on the south, and this together with Savoy and Nice should complete the circuit which was necessary for the greatness of France.

If Mazarin had been content with following out this plan he should probably have realised it. But while seeking to humble Spain and Austria, he was pursuing another object far more intricate, which his immortal predecessor had bequeathed to him, but for which he was ill suited. This was to destroy all remnants of feudalism, to weaken the nobility and gentry, and subject all if possible to the royal authority.

<sup>1</sup> Cousin, *Madame de Longueville*, vol. i. p. 329.

Mazarin, though not adopting the violent tactics of Richelieu, lost no opportunity of furthering this scheme, and in consequence provoked much discontent in all ranks of society. Some of the accusations brought against him were, however, unfair; for example, the various measures he employed to get money—increased taxation, sale of public offices, and new expenses. But at a time when taxes were so unequally fixed, and so many exempted from payment, how could he be expected to carry on war, to support armies, and enrich France, if he had not money? He took it then, and that caused an outcry; for glory and grandeur are not sufficient to appease misery. Hence everywhere there were murmurs, even attempts at revolt, which the Parliament, exasperated by the continual imposition of new burdens, fell into the lamentable error of encouraging and embittering. At the head of these, with still greater folly, were the great lords, even princes of royal blood, less zealous for the true interests of France than blindly attached to their own. These repeated agitations were known as the wars of the Fronde. From 1648-1652 they succeeded the foreign troubles, divided France, and retarded for many a year the realisation of Henry IV. and Richelieu's great plan.

The Fronde must never be compared with the Ligne. The latter was one of the noblest outbursts of Catholic France, inspired by the principle of religious unity, and at once called forth noble characters before whom Henry IV. had to yield.

It was not so with the Fronde. There was no principle at stake; no good result to be obtained. It was a strife of personal ambitions and interests, a tardy regret for the past, and an ungenerous forecast of the future. It was the last effort of feudalism. By its faults and its follies it brought about what it endeavoured to prevent, namely, the abasement of the nobility, which unhappy class, now that it was conquered, by its enfeeblement prepared the way for the despotism of Louis XIV.

How did Saint Vincent act during this trouble? He was intimately acquainted with a number of great lords and ladies who were mixed up with it. Did he espouse their quarrel? He did not admire Mazarin, but did he oppose him? He had the confidence of the Queen, but how did he use it? We presume to say we have deeply studied the life of Saint Vincent de Paul, and rarely is his character more admirable than in the disinterestedness which he manifested at this period. From the first day of the Fronde to the last, he sacrificed his dearest interests, his name, his works, his twofold family of charity, and

animated with one thought alone, he laboured constantly to lessen misery and restore peace.

The Fronde began in August 1648. A few hours after the arrest of some of the ringleaders, barricades were erected in the streets of Paris, and the mob shouted, "Down with Mazarin," The Queen, in terror, turned in her distress to Condé, the victor of Rocroy and Lens. He, though hating what he called the disloyalty of Mazarin, and the feebleness of the Queen, immediately placed his sword at her service. Reassured by his assistance, she left Paris with her son, and withdrew to Saint-Germain-en-Laye, while Condé at the head of 8,000 men began the blockade of the capital. Saint Vincent was horror-stricken at this news. What was to become of the city, filled as it was with the sick and dying, if the operations were to last any time? After much prayer and reflection, he resolved upon a bold step, but one worthy of his character. He determined to leave Paris secretly, make his way through the disordered bands that surrounded it, and go straight to Saint-Germain, where he should endeavour to prevail on the Queen and Mazarin to raise the siege and restore peace. In so agitated a period it was a dangerous undertaking. Saint Vincent might become the enemy and the victim of either party or of both. He knew this full well, but duty spoke, and his heart re-echoed its voice. He took, however, every precaution, and left a letter for Molé, the President, in which "he begged him to assure the Assembly that his only object in going to Saint-Germain was to bring about peace, and that the reason why he had not called upon him before leaving was, that he might be in a position to tell the Queen that he approached her solely on his own responsibility and without any influence on the part of others."

The saint left Paris on the night of January 14, 1649, and in consequence of the outposts that guarded the city, his journey to Saint-Germain was a very circuitous one. He rode accompanied by a lay-brother named Ducourneau. It was not yet day when they reached Clichy, and at the sound of the horses the travellers were accosted with fixed bayonets. But soon the former curé of Clichy was recognised, and threats were changed for shouts of welcome and of joy. At Neuilly, a little farther on, the Seine had overflowed and covered the bridge; here a new danger arose for the hero of charity. They begged him not to attempt to cross, but urged by the gravity of his mission, he trusted to Providence and safely reached the other side. "I trembled with fear," writes his companion,

“but I felt that God would guard a man who risked his own life for the sake of the poor.”

On reaching Saint-Germain he was immediately ushered into the presence of the Queen, to whom he spoke in the most moving terms of the state of Paris. “Is it just, madame,” said he, “that a million who are innocent should die of hunger for twenty or thirty who are guilty? Think of the miseries that will befall your people, of the ruins, the sacrileges, and the profanations that civil war brings in its train! And all this, for what? To retain one who is an object of public hatred. If the presence of Cardinal Mazarin is a source of trouble to the State, are you not bound to dispense with him, at least for awhile?” The Queen promised to do all she could to mitigate the severity of the siege, and to allow supplies to enter the city; but as to the rest she recommended the saint to treat with Mazarin. Saint Vincent left the presence of the Queen, and immediately appeared before the great Cardinal, with whom he spent a long time, speaking with gentleness, yet with determination. He went even so far as to say: “Your Eminence, yield to circumstances; cast yourself into the waves rather than wreck the vessel of the State.”—“This is a speech that is very daring,” quietly responded Mazarin, “and language which nobody has hitherto presumed to use. Nevertheless, I shall yield if M. le Tellier agrees.”

The clever Cardinal knew well that M. le Tellier, who owed him everything, would not have the same courage, and, as a matter of fact, things remained as they were. It was the first time that the thought of exile was forced on the Prime Minister. He was deeply wounded, and it is said he never forgave Saint Vincent. The latter left the court threatened with disgrace, but with a heart at ease from the consciousness of having done his duty. He remarked to his companion: “What I have said to the Queen and Cardinal is what I should wish to say to them were it the hour of my death.”

While Saint Vincent was thus incurring disfavour at court, he saw himself becoming an object of hatred and calumny to the other party. Notwithstanding all his precautions, his visit to Saint-Germain was misconstrued. It was said that he was in league with the Queen and Mazarin, against whom the indignation of the people knew no bounds. They attacked even their moral character. It was hardly to be wondered at, they said, that the Queen sacrificed everything, even France, to

Mazarin, since she had unworthy relations with him. Some, not wishing to go so far, said they were privately married, and that Saint Vincent de Paul had approved and blessed the marriage.<sup>1</sup> This even appeared in the papers, where too it was said that Mazarin was one of the Queen's lovers.

We shall not descend to discuss this insult. Saint Vincent was not the man to act that rôle, and the Queen was far above asking him. Her Spanish character gave her freer manners than were customary in France, and her enthusiastic admiration of Mazarin may have led her to write and speak less discreetly than was desirable. But her heart was always pure. Of this we have excellent testimony in the memoirs of Mme. de Brienne, one of the ladies of honour.

"It may be, I shall not dispute it, that the Queen imprudently manifested her esteem for Mazarin. Although she was absolutely innocent, yet the world, ever inclined to misjudge, eagerly believed what was untrue. The Queen's gallantry, if such it should be called, was altogether elevated and passing. She was Spanish in her manner, which attracted all by its charm, but never received a stain. This is what my mother led me to believe. The Queen, who loved her tenderly, was even approached one day by her on this delicate question. This is how it came about. It was at the time when Mazarin was in greatest favour at court, and the world, as I have said, ever eager for calumny, was gossiping about the mutual relations of the Queen and her minister. Mme. de Brienne had retired one evening, as usual, into the royal chapel. Soon after the Queen entered, and not perceiving anybody, she continued praying till suddenly a slight noise attracted her attention and she recognised my mother. 'Oh, is it you, Mme. de Brienne?' said her Majesty. 'Come, let us pray together, and our prayers will be the more acceptable.' When they had finished, my mother asked the Queen might she speak frankly about the Cardinal. Her Majesty embraced her cordially and commanded her to begin. My mother, with exquisite tact, but with perfect candour, then disclosed the state of public feeling and opinion. As she did so the Queen blushed deeply, and in the end exclaimed: 'Why, my dear Mme. de Brienne, did you not tell me this sooner? I acknowledge I am attached to him, I may say tenderly so, but I am not in love with him. If I am, my senses have no share in it, my mind alone is charmed with the beauty of his. Is that

<sup>1</sup> Chantelauze, *Les Gondi*, p. 310.

criminal? Do not deceive me ; if even in that there is the shadow of a stain, this moment before God and the relics of His saints here present I renounce it. I will never speak to him but of affairs of State, and should he introduce others I will depart.' My mother, still on her knees, caught the Queen's hand, and placing it on the altar, said, 'Swear, madame, to act as you have said.'—'I swear it,' replied the Queen, at the same time resting her hand on the altar, 'and may God punish me if I am in the least guilty.'—'Ah ! that is going too far,' responded my mother amid her tears ; 'God is just, and fear not but that His goodness will in time make known your innocence.' They both resumed their prayer, and she from whom I heard this fact, which, now that the Queen has received her recompense in heaven, I have thought it my duty not to pass over in silence, told me often that they never prayed more fervently. When they had finished, Mme. de Brienne implored Her Majesty to remain silent about her conversation, and, as a matter of fact, she never spoke of it even to the Cardinal, which to my mind is in itself a grand proof of her innocence."<sup>1</sup>

These things only came to be known afterwards. In the meanwhile Paris hated Mazarin, despised the Queen, and denounced Saint Vincent de Paul. Threats were soon turned to deeds, and on January 18, five days after the saints leaving Saint-Germain, eight hundred soldiers broke into Saint-Lazare and pillaged and destroyed what they found.

Under these circumstances Saint Vincent thought it more prudent not to return to the capital. He had failed in his mission, and his life would have been in danger. He resolved, therefore, to use this opportunity and make a visitation of the houses of his Congregation and of the Sisters of Charity. Thus he went to Villepreux, Étampes, Orleans, Mans, Angers, Rennes, Nantes, Luçon, and Richelieu, where he fell dangerously ill.

The following extract shows us how Saint Vincent acted during these journeys :—

"The inhabitants of Val-Puyseau having no seed, he procured it for them, as well as money, clothing, and implements with which to work. To give labour to all, he had roads and ditches made which otherwise would not have been done. He paid double the value of land, simply for charity's sake. To assist the poor people he brought and supported for more than ten years the Sisters of Charity. All this has been attested in the

<sup>1</sup> Cousin, *Madame de Hautefort* p. 90.



process of his canonisation.”<sup>1</sup> In this way Saint Vincent went about from place to place everywhere doing good.

Meanwhile Condé was urging on the siege of Paris. Saint Vincent, from the heart of the provinces, where he was labouring, watched every phase of the movement. The Queen had promised that corn should be allowed into the city, but her orders were not carried out. Saint Vincent wrote to her: “Madame, all Paris rejoiced to hear of your goodness, but sorrow soon succeeded joy when it was known that not even in Villette and Chapelle, which are a quarter of a league from Paris, would your gracious permission be respected by the soldiers. I most humbly beg your Majesty to grant me permission to make known that it is the royal wish that private property should be respected, and those who have sown should be allowed to reap their harvest. Moreover, if your Majesty would deign to remove the interference it would show the people that they are nearer to your heart than they think.” In consequence of the neglect of this order, the famine soon became unbearable. “You know,” writes Saint Vincent, March 4, 1649, “the losses we are sustaining, not only of the corn at Orsigny and Saint-Lazare, but even of our revenue, so largely dependent on the coaches, as in Saint-Lazare and the Collège des Bons-Enfants, where there are only seven or eight priests, eighteen students, and a few lay-brothers. Even with so little corn they manage to distribute every day three or four measures to the poor, which is a great consolation, and a reason for hoping that God will not abandon us.”

Forced by the famine, Paris opened its gates. Peace was signed at Ruel on March 11, and ratified by Parliament, April 1. On August 18, the Queen and her son, accompanied by Condé and Mazarin, made their solemn entry into the capital. People thought that these two great men were united for ever, and from their union a lasting peace was to follow. Alas! the most terrible of all the civil wars was close at hand. The Queen, as if she had a presentiment of it, at once wrote to Saint Vincent to return to Paris, for she had need of his counsel. Unhappily, he lay ill at Richelieu, and was unable to return, and perhaps prevent the misfortunes which were about to happen.

Condé was the greatest general of his time, but it must be admitted that his political talent was not equal to his military genius. He now found himself in the midst of intrigue and passion, influenced by his sister the Duchess of Longueville,

<sup>1</sup> Maynard, vol. iv. p. 30.

whom he tenderly loved, by his brother the young Prince de Conti, and his brother-in-law the Duke of Longueville. Under their influence he began to feel his old sentiments of dislike towards Mazarin, and manifested a coolness for the Queen. "Though as yet innocent," says Bossuet, he let it be clearly seen that he sympathised with the Fronde. Mazarin, who saw through his action, suddenly pounced upon him, and by a stroke of genius or of folly, the hero of Rocroy and Lens, the first prince of royal blood, together with his brother the Prince de Conti, and his brother-in-law the Duke de Longueville, were summarily arrested and confined within the dungeon of Vincennes. Soon after, fearing they might escape, they were transferred to the castle of Havre. How can we paint the horror of the capital, the indignation of Parliament, and the fury of the nobility at this proceeding? Parliament at once ordered the release of the prisoners, and the immediate banishment of Mazarin. The Queen refused to be separated from her minister, and for thirteen months (January 18, 1650, to February 6, 1651) the Cardinal fought against the storm. With what adroitness, but with what disregard for the most sacred things, was this strife kept up! Bishoprics, abbeys, even churches, were all given away to the most unworthy applicants, in order to gain partisans. We may imagine the anxiety among the ecclesiastics and laity who witnessed the recent labours for the reformation of the Church in France. What was to become of all that had been done to reanimate and purify the clergy, the Tuesday Conferences, the annual retreats, and seminaries, if, after all, inferior bishops and unworthy abbés were appointed? Saint Vincent more than anybody keenly deplored the situation, and many times went on bended knees before the Queen, conjuring her to think of God and the salvation of her soul. Père de Gondy came from his austere retreat for the same object, and reminded his Queen of the pillage and indignities to which she was exposing the Church. The saintly Bishops of Lisieux and Beauvais, both members of the Council of Conscience, likewise added their protestations. M. Olier, and many of the most distinguished ladies of society, including the Duchess d'Aiguillon, the Marchioness de Meignelais, Mme. de Hautefort and others, also joined with Saint Vincent in supplicating Her Majesty. But Mazarin was inflexible. Forced on every side, he determined to annihilate what he called the party of devotees. The Bishop of Lisieux was sent back to his diocese, Father de Gondy was ordered not

to appear at court, and the French Ambassador at the Vatican was instructed to cancel an application which had already been made to obtain the Cardinal's hat for the Bishop of Beauvais, who was also commanded to return to his see. "The absence of the Bishops of Lisieux and Beauvais from the Council of Conscience left Mazarin with only Saint Vincent as an opponent. Not succeeding in overcoming our saint, he was at last forced to temporarily suspend the council, which afterwards was only rarely convoked."<sup>1</sup> Thus free, he continued his nominations, and in the end literally did as he pleased.

Neither the Queen's piety nor the entreaties of the most holy persons would have prevailed, had not the indignation of Parliament, of the nobility, and even of the masses, risen to such a pitch that Mazarin lost courage and hastily left Paris for Havre. On reaching the castle he announced to the princes in person their release, thinking that this would in some measure propitiate them. But Condé received him with disdain, and the Cardinal felt he should leave France and seek refuge in Cologne. In the meanwhile the princes returned to Paris, and were greeted by the populace enthusiastically shouting, "Long live the King ! long live the princes ! down with Mazarin !"

We must insert here M. Olier's beautiful letter to the Queen-Regent, now in a state of desolation on the departure of Mazarin:—

"Madame, your graciousness in confiding to me that you were not making good use of the trials God has sent you, has emboldened me to address you now. In doing so I am actuated only by your confidence in me and the sincerity of my intentions for your welfare. Here are the dispositions in which you ought to establish your mind during these troubled times, in order that you may profit by adversity.

"Resign yourself, and see the justice of God in the withdrawal of the person on whom you relied. Providence has ordained this for reasons not known to us, and we must only adore His designs in a spirit of faith.

"Recall that passage in Holy Scripture where our Lord rebukes a spiritual king for falling away from his first fervour : *'I shall destroy your kingdom, if you do not humble yourself. Repent and renew the works you did in the beginning of your reign.'* Madame, resume the spirit of our Lord, which ought to reign in you, and through you in those who are under you. Rekindle your first fervour. You entered on your regency with an ardent desire to see God reign in His

<sup>1</sup> Cousin, p. 299.

Church ; you took every precaution in the selection of bishops, as you were bound in conscience to do. God sees that this is no longer the case, because you left the nomination to a person who has neither zeal nor courage to resist what is wrong. The evils resulting from this abuse can only be known on the Day of Judgment, as also the loss of so many souls, one of which is infinitely more precious than all the kingdoms of the earth. The end God has in view in calling men to fill these offices is that they may honour and serve Him as faithful ministers and labour for the salvation of souls. To procure this end ought to be your endeavour. Because the minister to whom you entrusted so important a duty as that of conferring benefices and appointing bishops, has acted unworthily, God has taken him away from you, in order to let you see anew your grave obligation. Adore in this action the mercy of God. He has deigned to remove that obstacle to your salvation, and afford you once more an opportunity of benefiting and sanctifying your kingdom by nominating worthy ecclesiastics.

“ Endure, madame, with patience and resignation the absence of your minister. Thank God for having disengaged you from the sad state in which you were, although through the fault of another. Suffer then this trial, first to satisfy your obligation, and also to repair as far you can so many nominations which were not weighed in the scales of the sanctuary. On this depends the honour of God in His Church, the salvation of many souls, and in particular your own eternal welfare. Let no one make you place your salvation in danger. Fill the vacancies and make the nominations yourself, after weighing the merits of the candidates and taking the advice of prudent men. Thus worthy persons shall be promoted, and you shall be ready to meet the importunities of courtiers. Never yield to them, for you are never permitted to expose your own salvation, so many souls and the glory of God to such a risk. Be determined, and do not relax for any human consideration whatever. God will then take special care of you, if you are faithful to Him. He will guard you in your kingdom, if you preserve His honour in the kingdom of His Church.

“ My profession not allowing me to take part in worldly matters, I am confining myself to what concerns the clergy. This sad state of things makes one even yearn to be released from the sight of it, and it is for that reason I presume to speak so openly. I am confident, however, that it is your Majesty’s

wish that her servant and subject should express his sentiments, especially when they are that God may reign in her heart, and through her in the hearts of all her subjects."

Unfortunately the time is past when even the humblest priest could thus address his sovereign. Saint Vincent de Paul, who had urged Père de Gondi to visit the Queen, can hardly have been ignorant of this letter, no more than of the numerous efforts made with the same purpose by so many pious and distinguished persons. The Queen felt herself in the midst of daily increasing discontent, and she had no one to help her, for Condé she would not trust. Menaced by the intrigues of Mme. de Longueville and Mme. de Chevreuse, she trembled for the destiny of her young son, and felt her only security lay in the genius of Mazarin. She was determined to remove the abuses complained of, but it was for him to return and restore order. Having secretly communicated with him, Mazarin hastily raised an army and came with ten thousand men. The fury of the Fronde knew no bounds on learning of his arrival. Parliament declared him guilty of high treason, and that he should be dispossessed of his property, part of which was ordered to be sold to realise a hundred and fifty livres, a reward for the person who should capture him living or dead.<sup>1</sup>

It is now that Mazarin's genius appears. Alone, against all, he did not hesitate for a moment, but continued his march, and effected a junction with the royal forces under Turenne. Condé commanded the troops for the Fronde, and then began that series of renowned marches and counter-marches, of which Bossuet speaks in the following terms :—"What endurance ! what courage ! what danger and what resource ! Were there ever two men so much alike in power, yet with characters so different, nay, almost opposite ? The one seemed to act after deep reflection, the other by a sudden inspiration. The latter quick, but not precipitate ; the former cold and calculating, yet not procrastinating, readier to act than to speak, resolute even when seemingly embarrassed. Condé from the very beginning showed signs of greatness, but advanced by degrees to the eminence he attained. Turenne seemed as one inspired, and from his very first engagement placed himself on a level with the most consummate military genius. The one by his ready and constant efforts won admiration and silenced envy, the other by his very brilliancy precluded attack. Turenne, by the greatness of his genius and the

<sup>1</sup> Feillet, p. 319.

incredible resource of his courage, escaped the greatest dangers, and profited even by the adversities of fate. Condé, by his birth, his almost preternatural talent, and an instinct unknown to ordinary men, seemed born to fashion fortune and make destiny his own."<sup>1</sup>

These marches and operations soon brought the two adversaries together before the gates of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine. Condé found himself between the army of Turenne and the walls of Paris, which were closed to him. It was a terrible situation. At this point the Duchess of Montpensier, a lady of royal blood, being the granddaughter of Henry IV., niece of Louis XIII., and cousin of Louis XIV., directed the guns of the Bastille to be turned on the King's troops, and by this manœuvre Condé was afforded an entry into Paris. By this terrible act she killed her own husband, and cut off all chance of a royal alliance. Far from saving France, she plunged it into still deeper misery. Condé entered the capital all blood-stained and covered with dust, but forgetful of himself he anxiously sought his wounded friends. Then appeared all the fury and horrors of the Fronde, the Hôtel-de-Ville was broken into, and the people, mad with rage, shouted death to Mazarin, while poverty, famine and pestilence became manifest on every side.

It was now that Paris felt the evils which had devastated the provinces, and which it had for so long a time refused to credit. It learned what it was to be dying of hunger, to be devoured by pestilence, and now too it learned the worth of the Priests of the Mission and of the Sisters of Charity. The capital was now to experience, like the provinces, the value, in time of pestilence, of the foundling hospital, soup dinners, charitable institutions; but above all it was to recognise and fully acknowledge the greatness of Saint Vincent de Paul. In a letter dated June 21, 1652, the saint enumerates all that was being done for the poor of Paris. "Soup is distributed every day to fifteen or sixteen thousand poor of every description. Eight or nine hundred young girls have been rescued from vice and misery, and the poor priests who had to abandon their parishes find a refuge here. They come to us to be supported, and also to receive instruction in their duties. See how many good works there are in which God permits us to participate. Our good Sisters of Charity are labouring nobly for the corporal assistance of the poor people. They make and distribute soup under the direction of Mlle. le Gras to thirteen hundred poor. In the

<sup>1</sup> Bossuet, vol. xii. pp. 627, 628.

parish of Saint-Denis they give it to eight hundred, and in that of Saint-Paul to five hundred, not to speak of their care of the sick and their other good works. I beg of you to pray for them and us.”<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile Saint Vincent was passing days and nights before the altar, praying God to send succour where all human aid had failed. He redoubled his penances, and urged his priests and the Sisters of Charity to do likewise. His one thought was to restore peace, to reconcile the contending parties and to effect the return to Paris of the Queen-Regent and her son. To obtain this end he directed all his prayers and penances, for he believed if this could be attained all other wounds would quickly heal. With this in view he wrote, August 16, 1652, to the Pope, feeling convinced that he alone could successfully intervene:—

“Most humbly prostrate at the feet of your Holiness, I, the most miserable of all men, offer to you anew and consecrate myself and the Congregation of Priests of the Mission, of which I, though most unworthy, have been made Superior-General by the Holy and Apostolic See. Confiding in your paternal goodness, I presume to represent to you the lamentable and pitiable state of our dear France.

“The royal house is divided, and the people split up into factions. The cities and provinces are burned and devastated by civil war. The harvest has not been reaped, nor sown for next year. Everybody and everything are at the mercy of the soldiery, who inflict terrible tortures, from which even if the people escape, it is only to die of famine. Not even the priests are secure, but suffer most awful persecution. Maidens, nay, virgins consecrated to God, are being dishonoured, and their convents and chapels plundered. The priests have to fly from their churches, and thus there are no sacraments administered to the dying, nor mass offered for those who could come. But worst of all, the Most Holy Sacrament is trampled under foot and the sacred vessels stolen. The misery cannot be realised except by those who witness it. It may appear presumptuous that a poor and unknown priest should write to your Holiness, who is so well informed in all that concerns nations, especially Christians nations. But I beg of you to bear with me. *‘I shall speak to my Lord, although I am but dust and ashes.’* The only remaining remedy for our evils is that your Holiness should exercise His paternal influence and authority. I am not ignorant that you are already grieved at our misery,

<sup>1</sup> “Letters,” vol. ii., p. 438.

and have already endeavoured to succour us in the person of your Nuncio, who has laboured so indefatigably, though without success. But there are many hours in the day, and if success does not come in the first, it may in the second. The arm of the Lord is not shortened, and I firmly believe that He has reserved for His Vicar on earth the glory of bringing rest after labour, joy after misery, and peace after war. I am convinced that He will through your Holiness re-establish union in the royal family, comfort the people harassed by a protracted war, restore health to the dying, bless the crops, bring nuns and priests back to their sanctuaries; in fine, give new life to us all. May it be so! Multiplying our supplications, and begging your blessing, I pray and hope for these happy results by the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, whose representative your Holiness is."<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile the desire for peace became general. The misery was at its height, and the people only wanted an excuse to lay down their arms. Ably advised by Mazarin, the Queen proclaimed on August 26, a full pardon to all without distinction who had taken part in the events of the last few years. This was the death-warrant of the Fronde, and all hastened to avail themselves of the amnesty. Deputations went to Compiègne, where the court was, and "the young King Louis XIV. received them with that dignity which was natural to him, and which lent a charm as well as a weight to what he said."<sup>2</sup> The deputations came back thoroughly satisfied, fully resolved to discontinue the war and welcome the return of the King.

There was, however, a difficulty still remaining which required solution, namely, should Mazarin take part in the triumphal entry of the royal party into Paris. It would seem that he had a right, for to him more than to anybody else was that triumph due. The Queen and her son knew and felt this, and desired that the Cardinal should enjoy his reward. But on the other hand, was it not to be feared that his presence should rekindle the yet dying flame, or at least weaken the reception of the King? Of this Saint Vincent de Paul had no doubt, for he believed it would be a fatal mistake. Probably he spoke to the Queen on the point, but evidently did not succeed, so he determined to appeal direct to Mazarin himself. His letter to the Cardinal was written with much care, and clearly reflects the saint's state of mind. It is dated September 11, 1652, and we give it almost in its entirety.

<sup>1</sup> "Letters," vol. i. p. 464.

<sup>2</sup> Cousin, *Madame de Longueville*, vol. ii. p. 171.



"I presume to address your Eminence, and trust you may be pleased to know that it seems to me Paris has returned to its former state, and is ready to welcome the King. This is the universal opinion ; and even the Ladies of Charity, who belong to the very highest society, say that they are prepared to go out to meet their Majesties should they learn of their coming.

"This being the case, I think your Eminence ought to urge the Queen-Regent and her son to return, and reciprocate the feelings of their people. There are, no doubt, objections to this course, but I humbly request your Eminence to consider my answer to them.

"The first objection is that, although there are many well disposed in Paris, yet there are others, some of whom are indifferent and some opposed to the King's return. To this I reply, there are very few indeed who oppose it, and those who are indifferent will be led by the majority, except perhaps those who should fear penalties, were they not reassured by the proclamation.

"In the second place, it is to be feared that the presence of the leaders of the opposition may provoke a repetition of the scenes of the Hôtel-de-Ville. My answer to this is that the one party will seize this opportunity of peace with the King, and the other, seeing Paris become loyal, will in turn submit. Of this I have not the slightest doubt.

"The third objection is that somebody may say to your Eminence, Paris ought to be chastised, and thus made to learn wisdom. Permit me to remind you of the example of Charles VI. under a similar revolt. As a punishment he disarmed a large number of the rebels, and took up the chain of office ; but this only fanned the flame, and for sixteen years they intrigued against him. Moreover, neither Henry III. nor Henry IV. benefited thereby.

"And if it is thought well that before the return of their Majesties some arrangements ought to be arrived at with Spain and the princes, believe me, the people of Paris will ultimately recognise the advantage and expediency of the amnesty, and declare for the princes on the first occasion.

"Some may say that it is your Eminence's interest that the King should not be reconciled with the princes and should not return to Paris without you, in order that it may be seen that it is not your Eminence who is the obstacle to peace, but the disloyal princes. To this I reply, what does it matter whether you return before or after the King, provided you do return, and of that I feel sure. Moreover, such conduct on the part of your

Eminence will regain the hearts of the people, and in a short time, as I have said, you will be recalled.

“Behold what I presume to suggest to your Eminence, confident that it will be well received, especially as I have had no communication whatever with those who are in opposition. Begging your Eminence to believe me, your most humble, obedient and faithful servant,

“VINCENT DE PAUL.”<sup>1</sup>

In accordance with the wishes thus expressed by Saint Vincent, the young King and Queen-Regent made their solemn entry into Paris, amid great jubilation, on October 21. Mazarin had retired to Bouillon, and awaited there the signal for his return. Peace and goodwill were rapidly restored, and Parliament and people, disabused of the Fronde, began to see that they had for four years impeded the prosperity of France. On February 3, 1653, Mazarin returned amid enthusiastic rejoicing. The Fronde was now over, and nothing remained except to heal the wounds it had opened; but this was not the business of the great Cardinal, it was the mission of Saint Vincent de Paul.

<sup>1</sup> “Letters,” vol. ii. p. 475.

## CHAPTER IV.

SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL LABOURS TO REPAIR THE DISASTERS  
OF THE FRONDE—THE GRANDEUR OF THE RELIGIOUS  
MOVEMENT OF THIS PERIOD.

1652-1660.

WHEN a vessel has withstood a violent storm and calm is restored, she is steered into port, where her damages are repaired and her whole frame newly strengthened. Such was the condition of Catholic France in 1652, and his charity and circumstances of the time imposed on Saint Vincent de Paul the task of renewing her. Already seventy-six, enfeebled in health, with his limbs hardly able to support him, he found himself alone when he turned to face the work. All the great men who had laboured for the spiritual regeneration of France had passed away. Saint Francis de Sales died in 1622, Cardinal de Bérulle in 1629, Père de Condren in 1641, Père Bourdoise in 1655, and M. Olier was soon to die in his arms. He alone, then, remained to carry the torch of this second regeneration, and he had only seven or eight years before him to do it. But those seven or eight years are the most fruitful of that extraordinary life, for, though old in years, he was young in spirit, wise by experience, and being devoured by a love of God and man, he diffused an odour of sanctity around him.

The spectacle that met Saint Vincent's view when he returned to Paris was singularly sad, and well calculated to discourage a less humble mind than his. Many of his works were in ruins, and the misery he had laboured to minimise had increased. Never were there so many outcast children on the streets, and no money to maintain them. Never were there so many young girls without education, religious instructions, or means of livelihood, and no shelter to receive and protect them. The licentiousness of the war and the Fronde had increased the number of these wretched beings ; it had made them sinners, and now there was no retreat in which to do penance. The streets were crowded with beggars, some truly poor, nay, dying of hunger ; others only feigning wretchedness, but extorting

money by threats. In Paris alone there were forty-five thousand of these beggars, and the environs were practically uninhabitable. To combat these different forms of misery, Saint Vincent had raised up his armies of charity. The evils, however, of the time had tended to increase the misery and decrease the ranks of his associations. The Gentlemen's Association of Charity suffered most, both from the war and the Fronde. In the midst of political strife the heart becomes dull, perhaps deadened, to charitable appeals. The premature death in 1649 of Baron de Renty had inflicted a severe blow on the men's association, from which it could hardly have recovered but for the timely intervention of our saint. Even as it was, the poor suffered considerably from its languishing state. The Ladies' Association of Charity had made a better resistance to the trials of the time. Even it, however, had been reduced from over two hundred members down to one hundred and fifty, and at one time down to ninety. Mme. Goussault's loss was the first blow, and Mme. de Lamoignon's the second. Fortunately, Mme. de Miramion and the Duchess d'Aiguillon were still to the fore; and with their aid and encouragement things would not long remain very low.

The other armies of charity, the Priests of the Mission and the Sisters of Charity, held together by their religious constitution, had better withstood the storm. No doubt, the Priests of the Mission, spread all over the afflicted provinces, had lost many eminent men; but, on the other hand, they had gained many young recruits, who, if they lacked the experience of their elders, were possessed of the zeal of martyrs. With the aid of these, Saint Vincent had founded eleven new houses, and what was still better, seven new seminaries. Later on, when the Congregation had increased still more, its members left their own country and renewed by their zeal in Africa, Scotland, Ireland, and Poland, the wondrous results of the first ages of Christianity.

Of all the works of Saint Vincent de Paul, the Sisters of Charity had suffered least, for the virgin consecrated to God seemed to grow strong under trials. Their number had increased, and their love of the poor had become a kind of passion. On one occasion, for example, the Duchess d'Aiguillon, overwhelmed with her works of charity, asked Saint Vincent to send her two sisters to aid her. Seeing all the good that she was doing, the saint readily consented, and told Sisters Barbe-Engiboust and Marie-Denise to go to the Petit-Luxembourg.

But the same evening the sisters came back in tears, saying they had not left father and mother to serve the rich and live in grand houses, and humbly asked to resume their labours among the poor. Saint Vincent used to recall this with tears of joy. "Are you not delighted," he writes to Mlle. le Gras, "to see the strength of virtue in these two sisters, and their contempt for worldly grandeur."

Another time the Queen of Poland requested Saint Vincent to send three sisters, who arrived at Warsaw in the midst of the plague. The Queen sent two to Cracow to work among the poor, but retained the third to help herself. When the sister heard of this arrangement she said, "Madame, I have given myself to God in the service of the poor. Your Majesty can easily find another person to help you." After thus she too joined her companions at Cracow.

We must give here that beautiful conversation which a dying sister had with Saint Vincent. When Sister Andrée was about to die, the saint said to her, "Have you any remorse of conscience, my dear sister?"—"No, Father, except that I took too great a pleasure in serving the poor."—"What! my daughter, nothing but that?"—"That's all, Father. I took too sensible a satisfaction in that, for it seemed to me that I was flying when I went to visit the poor, so great was my joy."—"Ah! then," said the saint, with tears in his eyes, "die in peace." Another sister had a marvellous escape as she was going up a staircase, the house having fallen and killed thirty-five persons. "I put my basket on a pole they held from the street, and leaping to the sheets held out below, found myself safely freed from the ruins. I then, though greatly frightened, continued visiting the sick."

Others also of this noble society fell martyrs to the plague, like that generous-hearted sister at Étampes, who, from her dying pallet, rose to soothe the last moments of a poor woman, and only left the sufferer's bed to return to die in her own. Far from weakening an order, such heroism only serves to strengthen it by infusing into it that holy enthusiasm which is its vivifying principle and most fascinating attraction. It was at this period that the greatest vocations came: Marguerite Chetif and Mathurine Guérin, the second and third Superioresses of the Sisters of Charity. Then there was Martha d'Auteuil, called the miracle-worker, and a number of others well worthy of note. Thus we see the material Saint Vincent had at his disposal after the misfortunes of the last few years. With

the same patience as of old, and with the same prudence, now further strengthened by experience, he began to place his works on a firmer and broader basis, so that henceforth we shall see them withstand every storm and survive every peril.

What was in the most critical state was the work of the foundlings, established only since the war began. It had no house of its own, and its revenue was insufficient, for it expended 40,000 livres a year, whereas its income did not exceed 17,000 francs. On the termination of hostilities the work seemed unable to hold out any longer, for many of the ladies had left Paris, and others were completely impoverished by taxes levied to defray the expenses of the war. All were of opinion that the work should be abandoned, for under the present circumstances it could no longer be maintained. Saint Vincent was decidedly opposed to this, saying that there was no work of more importance for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, and therefore it should be continued. Up to the time that these ladies undertook the work the poor foundlings were left to perish, but now they were baptized and enabled to live. His appeals not meeting with the success he looked for, Saint Vincent resolved to hold a general meeting of the Ladies of Charity, and supported by the Duchess d'Aiguillon, Mme. de Miramion, and Mme. de Traversay, to make one great and final effort to rekindle their courage and reanimate the work. At a fixed hour the assembly met, and Saint Vincent de Paul was there, ready with a carefully prepared and passionate appeal on behalf of the foundlings. Recent researches in Florence have brought to light the following hitherto unpublished document, which contains the saint's famous peroration, and besides, is most interesting from many points of view :—

“ I spoke to you on the last occasion very briefly of the works of the foundlings, because there were many other matters for discussion, and it was thought that the officers could meet the pressing wants for the time being. Experience, however, has shown that such is not the case, and now I must speak to you of their great poverty and the necessity for helping them.

“ 1. Because, being in extreme necessity, you are bound to help them. *Non pavisti, occidisti*. These infants may be killed in two ways, either by violence or by destitution.

“ 2. Because our Lord has chosen you to be their mothers.

“ 3. Because, after much prayer and consultation, you determined not to abandon them, and that for the following reasons :—

"(1) Because they were wretchedly cared for, there being only one nurse for four or five children.

"(2) Because they were sold for three sous to scoundrels, who broke their arms and limbs to excite all the more compassion.

"(3) Because women who had no children had picked up these and made them their own.

"(4) Because sometimes they were poisoned.

"(5) Because they hardly ever lived.

"(6) And worst of all, because they died without baptism.

"These were the motives which urged you to become the adoptive mothers of these poor castaways. If you too abandon them, they must die. What is to prevent it? The police have not prevented it up till now; and if you don't, who will? Most certainly nobody, and therefore, ladies, you are bound to rescue them. If you abandon them, what will God say, who committed them to your care?

"What will the King and the magistrates say, who gave them to your charge?

"What will the public say, who praised and blessed your noble work?

"But what will the poor little infants say? 'Alas! our mothers abandoned us, but they were wicked. But you abandon us also, you who are good;' which is as much as to say, 'God abandons us,' or that there is no God.

"Lastly, what will you say at the hour of your death, when God will demand of you why you abandoned these little orphans?

"For all these reasons, ladies, you are bound to continue the work. . . .

### "First Objection.

"1. The hard times which impoverish everybody compel each one to live very economically. To this my reply is, you shall never want on account of the foundlings. *Qui miseretur pauperis, nunquam indigebit.*

"2. There are a hundred among you, and if each contributes something towards a hundred livres it will be more than is necessary, and if all contribute something, together with what we have, things will be right.

"3. Some will say, I have no money. Oh, how different is your piety to that of the children of Israel, who gave their jewels for sake of the golden calf!

"4. Lastly, it will be said, this strain will continue, and thus our children will be exposed. But such is not the case.

*"Second Objection.*

"This poverty will overtake the association in future as well as at present.

"There are two important investments that will prevent that.

*"Means.*

"1. Prayer.

"2. Holy Communion.

"3. The support of relatives and friends.

"4. Charity sermons.

"5. Lastly, to make up their minds whether they should abandon the work or make an effort this year also."<sup>1</sup>

Let us see how the noble heart of Saint Vincent, inflamed by charity, urged in eloquent terms the motives he thus put forward. We may judge his whole speech by his magnificent peroration. "Ladies, pity and charity have forced you to adopt these little creatures as your children. You have been their mothers according to grace, when their mothers according to nature abandoned them. Will you also abandon them? Cease for the moment to be their mothers, that you may become their judges; their life and death is in your hands. I am about to take your verdict, for it is time now to pronounce sentence whether you will any longer have pity on them. They shall live if you continue to take care of them; they shall most infallibly die if you abandon them." The assembly replied, amid tears, that the work would be continued at any cost.

But of what value were these resolutions taken amid enthusiasm? Six months afterwards the financial embarrassment was equally bad. Saint Vincent now determined that some permanent remedy should be applied, and two things above all others secured, namely, a house and an annuity. Already they enjoyed 4,000 livres a year from Louis XIII., and Anne of Austria had increased this grant to 12,000. Parliament voted an annual sum of 15,000 livres, and it was left to public and private charity to make up the balance of the 40,000 which was necessary for the maintenance of the work. Louis XIV., however, completed the grant from his own purse. Now that the annuity was secured, the next thing was to find a suitable house. At first the Queen presented the Château de

<sup>1</sup> "Conferences," vol. ii., p 657.



Bicêtre, but the infants not getting good health there, necessitated a change. At last a house was procured in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, and here was built that greatest of all the saint's institutions, the Foundling Hospital. Twelve Sisters of Charity were sent to carry on the work, and here the foundlings were received without it ever being known by whom they were abandoned. "Noble invention of charity," says M. de Lamartine—"hands open to receive the victim, eyes and lips closed to hide the culprit."

Thus was completed, years after the death of our saint, no doubt, that great Foundling Hospital, which, beginning in Paris, was soon copied in Lyons, Marseilles, Toulon, Dijon, nay, throughout France, and which, from the boldness of its conception, the appropriateness of its design and the magnitude of the benefits it conferred, deserves to be ranked as the grandest institution founded by Saint Vincent de Paul. While labouring at this work, he was also engaged in reviving another of not less importance, namely, free schools for children. He was not the originator of these, for the Church, ever solicitous that the young should be educated, had always enjoined it on her bishops, urged it in her councils, and wherever she built a cathedral or a monastery, there too she built a school. Thus was it for fifteen centuries; but unfortunately the seats of learning which studded the country in the Middle Ages were cruelly swept away by the wars of the Ligne and the Fronde. A remedy should then be found for such a state of things, and fortunately the Sisters of Charity were ready to meet the want, for from the very beginning Saint Vincent had taught them to consider the education of the poor as one of their principal duties. Margaret Nazeau, the first Sister of Charity, was passionately devoted to this work, and very soon the sisters, supported by contributions from pious ladies, began to establish free schools for the poor all over France.

But if the children of the poor had to be rescued from ignorance and vice, even still more urgently was assistance necessary for those who had lost their virtue and honour. In the midst of such disorders as had prevailed for the last few years, the number of these unfortunate beings had become considerable, and now more than ever Saint Vincent resolved to save them. Not content with the numerous asylums already founded in Paris by Mmes. de Meignelais, Miramion, Combé, and Mlle. Pollalion, he conceived the idea of establishing a large hospital or penitentiary. As usual, he began by seeking

advice, procuring a house and an annuity ; but he did not live to complete this great work, which, however, was carried out by the Sisters of Charity.

While our saint was thus engaged in founding schools and penitentiaries, a wealthy citizen of Paris offered him 100,000 francs, to be applied to any charity he might select. The saint was free to expend it on his own Congregation, but, with characteristic disinterestedness, he devoted the money to a totally different object. It is often the misfortune of aged labourers and tradesmen that after a life of toil they have not enough to support themselves in old age. Here was an opportunity for most usefully spending this munificent gift. Saint Vincent consulted the donor, and suggested that the money should be expended in building a home for the aged, where husband and wife might live together still, and end their days in peace and comfort. So pleased was the good citizen with this idea, that he added 30,000 francs to what he had already given, and thus was begun the Hospital of the Holy Name of Jesus, under the management of the Sisters of Charity ; and to this day it stands as a happy home for the aged poor, and as a monument to the charity of Saint Vincent de Paul.

Besides these foundations directly made by Saint Vincent de Paul, how many others grew up around him, of which he was the inspirer and counsellor ! No one could approach him without being warmed by the fire of charity which consumed him. The Duchess d'Aiguillon stands pre-eminent among the noble ladies who laboured so much in the cause of Christian charity at this period. She almost exhausted her resources to meet the evils of the civil war ; but besides that, the Collège des Bons-Enfants in Paris, hospitals in Quebec, Marseilles, Algiers, Richelieu, and a house for the Priests of the Mission in Rome, are some of the fruits of her extraordinary charity. Next we must mention Mme. de Miramion, famed for her beauty, but far more renowned for her work among fallen women. She built at her own expense two penitentiaries, and placed them under the direction of Saint Vincent de Paul. Mlle. Pollalion founded the Seminary of Providence, a house designed to receive young girls who wished to amend their lives ; and in connection with this institution was the Christian Union, an organisation to receive converts, and which merited the public applause of Fénelon. It was with the advice of Saint Vincent that Mlle. de Blosset founded the Sisters of Sainte-Genève, and Mlle. Marie Saucier established so many

free schools. Under his direction, too, arose the Sisters of the Cross ; as it was likewise under his protection they triumphed over calumny and persecution. In fact, all had recourse to him, and always found encouragement and support.

It was not merely by his person and advice that he assisted and encouraged good works. Far and wide, where he had never been seen, his very name evoked enthusiasm and wrought a powerful influence for good. Hardly had the world seen and felt the benefit of the Sister of Charity, the beauty of the conception and its appropriateness to meet the wants of the time, than a hundred copies arose almost rivalling their model in works of mercy. Thus were founded the Sisters of Saint Joseph at Puy, of Saint Charles at Nancy, and Saint Agnes at Arras, and all destined to serve the poor, to clothe the orphan, to tend the sick, to teach the young, to visit the prison, to rescue the fallen, nay, even on the battlefield to heal the wounded, and soothe the dying.<sup>1</sup> To these must be added the Sisters of Saint Maurice, the Sisters of the Faith, the Sisters of Providence and the Sisters of Mercy.<sup>2</sup> Thus what in the beginning of the century was judged an impossibility by the most pious bishops, and what Saint Francis de Sales had hesitated to undertake, was successfully accomplished by Saint Vincent de Paul.

With these Congregations without perpetual vows and enclosure must be joined all those other bodies exclusively devoted to hospital work, and which are no less the product of the zeal and charity of our saint. At Fliche, Mlle. de Melun, after abandoning the world, that was charmed with her beauty and grace, spent her life and fortune in establishing hospitals at Beaufort, Beaugé, Laval, Nîmes, Avignon, and even as far away as Montreal. About this period also were founded the great hospitals of Angers and Nantes. In the Diocese of Rouen alone twenty-four charitable institutes were established, and in that of Clermont almost as many, while the diocese of Orleans exceeded either. Hospitals sprang up with extraordinary rapidity at Caen, Dijon, Nancy, Marseilles, Grenoble, Amiens, and many other large centres. The enthusiasm was widespread, and charity manifested itself everywhere in works of mercy.

It was not that the old orders had lost anything by the introduction of the new, but the enthusiasm which fifty years before had greeted the advent of the Carmelites and Franciscans was now renewed in the case of the Sisters of Charity.

<sup>1</sup> Picot, p. 421

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*, p. 423.

As active and lasting charity enlivens faith and piety, the churches of Paris soon became insufficient to accomodate the ever-increasing number of the faithful. Each year saw several edifices raised to the glory of God. In 1646 Saint-Sulpice, in 1653 Saint-Roch, in 1655 the Oratory, in 1656 Notre-Dames-des-Victoires, and in 1659 the Madeleine. But what shall we say of the provinces ? The work is too vast to dwell upon here ; it is sufficient to say that notwithstanding the many imprudent nominations to bishoprics which had been made in the time of the Fronde, a number of saintly bishops, either friends or pupils of Saint Vincent de Paul, were labouring strenuously and successfully to regenerate their dioceses. The fruit of their labours is seen in the number of churches that were built. At Dax was Mgr. Desclaux, to whom Saint Vincent wrote to congratulate him on his labours for the erection of seminaries ;<sup>1</sup> at Luçon, Mgr. Nivelles, a second Saint Francis de Sales ;<sup>2</sup> at Grasse, Mgr. Godeau, a distinguished member of the Tuesday Conference and promoter of the *Gallia Christiana* ; at Marseilles, Mgr. Gault, a man of such heroic virtue that the French clergy have petitioned Rome to proceed to his canonisation. Other names not less deserving of mention occur about this time ; suffice it to say, however, that Saint Vincent's letters are full of admiration for the French bishops between 1650-1660.

Besides these bishops there were also many priests eminent for their virtue and zeal, men who were reared in the ecclesiastical seminaries and matured in the Tuesday Conferences. In Paris were the Abbés de Chaudenier, nephews of Cardinal Rochefoucauld, both men of the highest virtue, who refused every dignity, and laboured incessantly for the poor. At Angers was the Abbé de Vaux, who brought there the Nuns of the Visitation and the Sisters of Charity, and who died in the odour of sanctity. At Saumur was the Abbé Bouvard, son of one of the King's physicians, a rich man, but who, despising this world, spent his wealth and life in the service of the poor. The Venerable Bénigne Joly was then at Dijon, and many other illustrious ecclesiastics were to be met throughout France, founding seminaries or erecting institutes of charity.

It was these seminaries that were to bring forth those great men whose genius is the lasting glory of the seventeenth century : Bossuet, Massillon, Fénelon, Bourdaloue and Fléchier. The latter were still young, and Bossuet only Archdeacon of Metz,

<sup>1</sup> "Letters," vol. ii. p. 58.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* p. 183.

but he was soon to startle the social world of Paris by his eloquent pleading of Saint Vincent's latest work—the General Hospital. Of this institution we can now form no idea. It was the greatest work ever attempted by Christian charity. It was estimated that 45,000 beggars were on the streets of Paris by day, and haunted its lanes and alleys by night. The object of the General Hospital was to receive all those who through sickness or age could not work, and by this means afford a shelter for honest poverty, and at the same time expose hypocrisy. The immediate consequence would be to make those work who were able, for begging in the streets was to be strictly forbidden.

The Duchess d'Aiguillon was the first to conceive the plan of this great work. She consulted with Mme. de Lamoignon and her other friends, including President de Bellièvre, but many thought the undertaking was entirely beyond their reach. After a while the Duchess spoke to Mlle. le Gras, who recommended her to interview Saint Vincent. But even our saint at first sight deemed the project too great. Being urged to consider the matter, he consented to spend eight days in prayer, during which he hoped to find out the will of God. At the end of that period he sent for the Duchess d'Aiguillon, and announced to her that the work should be undertaken. Immediately subscriptions were begun, and large sums were contributed by the Queen-Regent, Mazarin, the Duchess d'Aiguillon, President de Bellièvre and many others. Everybody, in fact, was desirous of having a share in so noble a work, so that the princes, magistrates and great ladies of the capital sent large sums of money. The building went up as if by magic, and soon the beggars of Paris had to choose between work or the hospital, for henceforth no begging was to be tolerated in the streets. The consequence was that out of the 45,000 paupers who hitherto infested the capital, 5000 found a shelter in the General Hospital, while the other 40,000, now deprived of their trade of professional begging, were forced to work. Here we have an example of the wisdom and strength of Christian charity, of the marvels of its power, and the genius of our holy religion. It was on behalf of the General Hospital that Bossuet delivered his magnificent oration of Saint Paul: *Cum infirmor tunc potens sum*. Saint Vincent was listening to him, and it is a charming thought to picture together the disciple and the master, the former with his mind resplendent with genius, the latter with his heart all on fire with charity.

## BOOK V.

### SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL PERFECTS HIS TWO GREAT WORKS, THE PRIESTS OF THE MIS- SION AND THE SISTERS OF CHARITY.

1652-1660.

#### CHAPTER I.

SPREAD OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION—LABOURS  
AND SUFFERINGS OF THE MISSIONERS IN BARBARY.

1652.

WHILE the events narrated in the last chapter were taking place in France, and the Priests of the Mission with the Sisters of Charity were going through the towns and villages of Lorraine, Champagne, Burgundy, and Orleans, bringing aid and consolation amid the horrors of war, famine and pestilence, others of the Priests of the Mission were leaving France, and at the bidding of Saint Vincent de Paul going to the assistance of those in foreign lands. To Barbary, Algiers and Tunis they went to evangelise the slaves ; to Rome and Genoa, to reform the clergy and assist the poor ; and to Scotland and Ireland, to sustain the faith of Catholics suffering the cruel persecution of Cromwell. The pious Queen Mary de Gonzagua brought the children of Saint Vincent to Poland, and far away in the heart of the Indian Ocean they were dying on the ungrateful soil of Madagascar. The great heart of Saint Vincent knew no bounds, and where souls were to be saved, suffering to be relieved and tears to be dried, he never rested till he had sent his children there. The history of these missions recalls the most glorious epoch of the Church, and even the history of the catacombs.

Of all the countries that appealed to the heart of Saint Vincent the desolate region of Algiers, Tunis and Tripoli was the foremost, for there the people groaned under the cruel yoke of the Turk. He had been a slave there for two years, and had tasted

drop by drop the bitter chalice of ignominy and suffering which falls to the lot of the unhappy captive. One cannot think without a shudder of the horrors perpetrated on Christians, especially women and children. At Algiers more than 20,000 slaves were in chains ; at Tunis, 6,000 ; at Biserte there were five galley-ships, at Fez two, and at Tripoli four, making a total for the three towns of 40,000 slaves. Every day brought three, four, or five thousand Christians to Algiers and Tunis, fresh for the slave market, having been captured on the high seas. Among these were nobles, chevaliers, priests, and members of the best families. Stripped of their clothes, they were bought and sold in public market, and their purchasers acquired a right of life or death. Usually they were brought away up the country and subjected to the most degrading treatment. At Tunis and Biserte they were chained and guarded night and day, but at Algiers only at night. Picture a long series of horse-boxes containing three or four hundred horses, and you have a slave market, with this exception, however, that horses are usually well fed and cared for, but the Christians were left in a state of misery and total abandonment. The Turks hated their religion, and, moreover, often the passion of the slave-drivers was vented on their helpless victims till they died or were left cripples for life.

“These wretched beings thus confined were only brought out to till the ground, to row the galleys or other ships, and frequently to wage war against their fellow-Christians. When they rowed or worked they were very scantily clad, exposed to the burning heat of summer and the piercing cold of winter. On their return, worn out with fatigue and as if half dead, they were huddled together like beasts in their stables, rather to languish than find repose. It is incredible to see the labour and the heat they endured, which would have been sufficient to kill a horse. Their skin wasted off their bones, and their tongues hung out like those of dogs, because of the awful heat. One winter’s day an aged slave, worn out with misery and no longer able to bear it, implored for his release, but the cruel answer came that he must work. Such sufferings drive but to despair, and many, seeing no other ray of hope, preferred death itself than so miserable an existence. Hence some cut their throats, others hanged themselves, while not a few, exasperated by the cruelty of their masters, attempted to murder them, and as a punishment were burned alive. Worst of all, some renounced the faith of Jesus Christ and lived in a

state deserving eternal damnation, in order to escape their cruel sufferings.”<sup>1</sup>

Now France tolerated all this without saying a word. Thousands of Frenchmen were being treated as beasts without Louis XIII., Richelieu, Mazarin, or Louis XIV. making the slightest move. Saint Vincent bitterly deplored the situation, and anxiously sought how a remedy could be applied to so frightful a calamity.

There were a number of French consuls at Algiers, Tunis, and Tripoli; but separated from France by a sea that they could not safely traverse, their power was reduced almost to nought. Seeing themselves as little watched as sustained in their authority, they utilised their position to quickly enrich themselves and return home as soon as possible. No doubt by a treaty between the King of France and the Sultan, consuls could retain a priest as chaplain; but this they never did, for fear of displeasing the Turks, and thus there were scarcely any priests in Africa. Thousands of slaves were almost entirely abandoned and deprived of the sacraments and all spiritual aid. Saint Vincent de Paul determined to put an end to so deplorable a state of affairs. He communicated with the consuls at Algiers and Tunis, reminded them of the treaty, refuted their objections, calmed their fears, and obliged them to receive as chaplains two or three of the most eminent members of his Congregation. Later on he increased the number, placing one or two on each galley. As time elapsed he saw that these priests had neither sufficient liberty nor authority, so he resolved upon a bold step. He got his friend the pious Duchess d'Aiguillon to purchase the consulates of Algiers and Tunis. Such was the custom at the time. Here he at once placed pious laics, and subsequently Priests of the Mission, whom he raised to the dignity of consuls, and, in order to come to the assistance of the slaves, invested them with all the powers and privileges attached to the office.

This was such a bold idea that it stirred Rome, and the Propaganda addressed a letter of remonstrance to Saint Vincent. It recalled the sacred canons which forbid priests, especially missionaries in pagan countries, to meddle in commerce or temporal affairs. Saint Vincent replied that there was no question of business or politics, but only the service of God and the slaves, which could be better secured by priests as consuls, since it was so difficult to find suitable laymen. It was a work of

<sup>1</sup> Abelly, vol. i. pp. 381-382.



charity, not of self-interest ; of self-sacrifice, not of gain ; for such offices were a heavy burden on the Congregation, and the expenditure far exceeded the income. "Algiers costs thirty thousand livres, and Tunis requires as much more. Hence," adds Saint Vincent, "we should long ago have given them up, were it not to abandon to wolves twenty or thirty thousand souls, whom we are endeavouring to preserve to the Church and to God by means of these temporal positions. Indeed, I know not but that in the end we shall be forced to resign, especially if our priests are not allowed to exercise their functions. That would be a great misfortune, because of the great good which it pleases God to accomplish through them, and which should then entirely cease."<sup>1</sup>

The Propaganda urging the point, Saint Vincent again wrote : "If the Propaganda is unwilling to authorise the priests as consuls, let it at least tolerate them. If it is otherwise, we shall have to abandon the slaves, since it is impossible to assist them without the authority of consuls. Suitable laymen cannot be found to do the work of God, after the treatment which the last received. However, we shall not withdraw till the last moment, for it would be a great misfortune."

Evidently the Propaganda was convinced by these reasons, for the saint not only continued but increased his work among the consuls.

Saint Vincent, who knew well the dangers to which those should be exposed who went to Algeria, whether as missionaries or as consuls, chose them with the greatest care. As a matter of fact almost all died as martyrs, either from the pestilence or from the cruelty of the Turks. We shall name a few of the principal. The first whom our saint destined for Tunis was Father Guérin, and he gave him as a companion an exemplary lay-brother, François Francillon. Father Guérin had been a soldier before becoming a priest. He displayed rare courage and coolness amid the horrors of Lorraine and Champagne, and deeming such trials as nothing, he dreamed of dying amid the Turks and their captives. On learning his mission he was delighted. "Somebody remarked to him that he seemed very happy, and that at last he was going to be hanged in Barbary. 'I hope for even more,' he replied, with his eyes beaming with zeal."

The second, who set out shortly afterwards to aid Father Guérin, was Father le Vacher. At one time he was about to be married, but an unforeseen obstacle broke off the engagement,

<sup>1</sup> Letter of Saint Vincent to Father Jolly, Superior of the Mission at Rome.

and he came to Saint Vincent to receive consolation. At the very first sight of the young man the saint had a light as if an inspiration. Under a frail body he recognised an iron will. "Leave the world," said the saint, "and come to Saint-Lazare." Young le Vacher obeyed, was ordained priest, and was now being sent as a missionary to Africa. As Saint Vincent was standing on the threshold of Saint-Lazare, embracing him before leaving for Marseilles, the Nuncio chanced to arrive. The saint, turning towards him, said, "My lord, be so good as to bless this young missionary, who is setting out for Barbary."—"What! that child," exclaimed the Nuncio in astonishment. "Yes, my lord, such is his vocation."

On his arrival at Marseilles, Father le Vacher fell ill, and the Superior of the house where he was stopping wrote to the saint representing the impossibility of sending him on such a voyage and to labours evidently beyond his strength. "I beg you, Father Chrétien" (this was the Superior's name), immediately replied Saint Vincent, "to see that Father le Vacher embarks as soon as possible. If the weakness occasioned by his illness is so great as to prevent him walking to the ship, let him be carried; but no matter what state he is in, he is to embark. If after twenty or thirty leagues he can no longer stand the sea air, he may go down and lie in the cabin."

Never before had Saint Vincent spoken thus. To induce a person to join the Congregation would have been repugnant to his humility; to force him into danger, contrary to his prudence. But the sequel makes it evident that he had the foresight of a genius or an inspiration from God. Father le Vacher became the hero of Africa. His zeal and charity among the slaves; his firmness before the Bey; the undeserved insults and outrages which he suffered; his tedious journeying from galley to galley; his fruitful consulate; his wonderful age, for he survived Saint Vincent; and finally, his glorious death at the mouth of a cannon, made him for fifty years the soul and model, as yet unrivalled, of the African missionaries.

Side by side with Father le Vacher we must put Mr. Husson, a parliamentary lawyer in Paris. Saint Vincent sent this gentleman to replace Father le Vacher as consul, for the latter, since he had been nominated Vicar-Apostolic of Tunis, felt the burden too heavy. "He is the most accomplished young man," wrote Saint Vincent, "that I know. You will be able soon to see his virtue, so I shall say nothing, except that you should show him the greatest respect. He is not only prudent,

agreeable, industrious and pious, but also clever in business matters and always ready to help his neighbour. His intention in going to Barbary is simply to serve God and the poor slaves, and he is leaving his home and family, who are exceedingly attached to him, and endeavouring with tears and remonstrances to prevent his going."

While Saint Vincent was thus providing for the wants of the mission of Tunis, he was also sending two missionaries to Algiers—Father Novelli, a young priest of heroic courage, and Brother Barreau, who was to become consul. Father Novelli only lived to reach Africa, for, arriving in the midst of a plague, he laboured night and day among the dying till he was carried off himself when scarcely thirty. Saint Vincent had the highest idea of him, and wept whilst paying him his tribute of praise. Between seven and eight hundred slaves followed his hearse. The two missionaries, Fathers le Sage and Dieppe, whom our saint next sent to replace him, were likewise taken away by the plague in a very short time, and Brother Barreau again found himself alone.

Brother Barreau's courage was like that of Father le Vacher, but he allowed his heart to carry him away. His greatest desire was to deliver the slaves by paying their debts. He gave everything he had, even more than he had, and went beyond his means to ransom them. He took upon himself a captive's debts, and as he could not pay them he was put into prison after prison. It was imprudence, no doubt, but an imprudence of the saints, which the world condemns, but heaven forgives. Saint Vincent reproved it, but not too severely, for he admired the brother's peace, courage and unalterable charity. On the failure of a Marseilles merchant with whom Brother Barreau had no business whatever, the Pacha required payment from him. As he could not procure the money, he received hundreds of blows and stripes on the feet. When the slaves saw the consul who was so tenderly devoted to them suffering so much, they came with their little savings and pledged themselves to a perpetual captivity to save him.

Some of the other disciples of Saint Vincent—Mr. Philippe le Vacher, brother of the consul at Tunis, and himself afterwards consul at Algiers; Mr. Huguier, formerly a solicitor, and afterwards a priest and martyr—threw themselves into the work of relieving the slaves, and soon not only Algiers, Tunis and Tripoli, but Tetouan, Tangiers, Biserte, Salé, and even the smallest ports, had priests and pious laymen working for their amelioration.

Saint Vincent was the soul of it all. He encouraged them with his counsel and sustained them by his praise. He multiplied his letters to Father le Vacher, Father Novelli and Brother Barreau, and at the same time went about Paris collecting money to send it to them and save them from insults and imprisonment. When Father le Vacher was ignominiously chased out of Tunis, and Brother Barreau beaten and cast into prison, the saint went to Mazarin, Anne of Austria and young Louis XIV. He represented to them that it was a disgrace to a nation like France to allow her consuls to be treated in such a manner. The letters, however, which he induced them to send to the Sultan at Constantinople, to the Beys of Algiers and Tunis, were, alas ! as fruitless as the treaties already so audaciously broken.

While Saint Vincent de Paul was thus labouring to ameliorate the sad lot of the slaves, by one of his most beautiful acts of kindness, his room in Saint-Lazare had literally become a post-office for Africa. He received the letters of slaves for their friends at home, he sent their answers back, and all that at his own expense. But it was not only letters but money that he received and sent for the slaves and their friends. He became their banker and treasurer, and it is most touching to see to what a pitch he carried on the correspondence. For example, he writes : " We have received a crown for Renaud le Page, and another for Lesueur, both galley-slaves on the *Duke* ; I must ask Mr. Huguier to give it to them."—" *P.S.*—I have just received a letter with thirty livres for Martin de Laucre ; would you be so kind as to give it to him ? Also twenty-one livres for Vincent Traverse ; I am writing to Mr. Huguier to give it to him." Again : " This is a bill of exchange for a hundred livres, payable to you by Mr. Abeille ; you will please send that sum to Algiers for Nicolas Renouard to enable him to return to France. We have also received a letter containing a crown for Martin de Laucre, galley-slave on the *Mercares*, at present stationed at Marseilles ; I beg of you to give it to him." In another place : " I shall vouch your account and see that it is correct ; it is necessary to add, first for Pierre Legros, known as Lapointi, four crowns which we have received here, and secondly, over seven livres for Father Esbran, a galley-slave on the *Baillibaude* ; I am writing to Mr. Huguier to give both these sums to their owners." " I beg of you also to send to the brothers Jean and Bernard de la Roquette 506 livres ; to be expended in releasing the elder. You will be so kind as

to take this sum from the gross amount which you have." Again: "We have got over ten livres for Renaud le Page, three livres for Jacques Maugé, and three hundred livres for Father Esbran, all slaves. Send us Mr. Huguier's account since our last payment, and I shall forward as much as we can afford."

"Mme. de Romilly has just sent us fifty livres to ransom her son, who is a slave in Tunis. Give them to Father le Vacher."

Again: "O, sir! when will you be able to send us Dom nique de Laius? When will you give him back to his wife and six children? Can you not induce his master to accept less than six hundred piastres? That is very high for a person who has nothing of his own, for whatever you have already received for him is entirely made up from alms. Release him, I beg of you, as soon as possible, and send him back to France on the first opportunity. Advance whatever is necessary, and, if need be, borrow it, and I shall send on immediately what you require. See also about the money I sent for the person who was most in danger of apostatising."

We could quote more than fifty similar letters. The humble room of Saint Vincent de Paul had become a bureau for letters to and from the slaves and for alms to release them. At the same time he was establishing for them a hospital at Algiers and another at Tunis.

The solicitude of our saint to ameliorate the material condition of the slaves was nothing in comparison to his anxiety for the interests of their souls. He knew how exposed they were to forget God, to despair, to blasphemy and apostasy. In the year 1649, at Algiers, there were close on 10,000 apostates, at Tunis, 1,800; and at Salé and Tripoli between five and six hundred. But the children of Saint Vincent were not long among the slaves till things became changed. Faith was revived, and repentance sprung up. Slaves were to be seen heroically abjuring their apostasy even at the risk of their lives. At their own expense they erected in each galley a little chapel where the Blessed Sacrament was preserved, and a lamp burned before it day and night. Sundays and feasts were observed with great poverty, no doubt, but with extraordinary piety. Often the entire night was spent in hearing confessions, for the masters would not allow even an hour to the slaves during the day. "We heard," writes Father Guérin, "on Easter Sunday, that a galley from Algiers had arrived at Biserte. I immediately set out to visit the poor Christians on board, and found three hundred. I took with me a priest to help me, and we gave all

their Easter duty, with the exception of some Greek schismatics. O God! what a consolation to see the devotion of these poor captives, most of them for a long time, some even ten and twenty years, deprived of the sacraments. I made them leave the galleys and come ashore every day, in order to receive holy communion in a private house where I said mass.”<sup>1</sup>

We may well imagine that amid this renewal of faith and devotion among the galley-slaves, the name of France was not forgotten. “You will be delighted to hear,” wrote Father Guérin to Saint Vincent, “that on Sundays and feasts the *Exaudiat* and other prayers for the King may be heard in our chapels. Even foreigners manifest the greatest esteem and regard for him. It would also be most gratifying to you to witness the devotion with which the poor slaves pray for their benefactors, who, as they recognise, come for the most part from France. Certainly it is no little consolation to see here all nationalities praying for our country.”

But it was not merely piety that was to be found among the galleys, but a spirit of faith so exalted that it ambitioned martyrdom. Of this we have beautiful examples. At Algiers, a young man, about twenty-two years, named Pierre Bourgoing, just as he was being carried off to the galleys at Constantinople, had a fit of despair. He went to the Pacha and asked to be released and not sent to the galleys. The Pacha consented on condition that he would apostatise, and used every means to induce him to do so. Finally, after threats and promises, the poor slave gave in and renounced the faith. However, this poor young man always preserved in his heart sentiments of veneration and love for his religion, for it was only through weakness and fear that he had denied it. He even declared that though he was exteriorly a Turk, yet within he was a Christian. By degrees he began to have remorse for his sin, and touched with true repentance, he resolved to expiate it by death rather than continue in his state of infidelity. He commenced to speak openly of his contempt for Mahometanism, even in presence of Turks. He sometimes feared the cruelties of these barbarians, and the terrors which awaited him made him tremble. “But no matter,” said he. “I hope that our Lord will assist me. He died for me, it is only right I should die for Him.” At last urged by remorse of conscience and a desire of repairing the scandal he had given, he took the noble resolution of going to the Pacha and addressing him in these words: “You have seduced me in making me-

<sup>1</sup> Abelly, vol. i. p. 392.

renounce my religion, which is true, and in embracing yours, which is false. Now I declare that I am a Christian ; and to show you that, I abjure with all my heart the religion of the Turks, and cast you back the turban which you gave me." While saying this he threw the turban at the Pacha's feet, and then added : "I know you will kill me, but no matter, I am ready to suffer any torments for my Saviour Jesus Christ." The Pacha, enraged at such hardihood, condemned him at once to be burned. They immediately stript him of his clothes, and putting a chain round his neck, forced him to drag the beam on which he was to be burned. As he passed out of the Pacha's house in this condition, he was surrounded by a large crowd of Turks, renegades, and Christians. Raising his voice he repeated those beautiful words : "Live Jesus Christ ! May the Roman Catholic and Apostolic Church triumph for ever ! There is no other in which one can be saved !" With these words on his lips he fearlessly met the flames and suffered death for Christ.

Now one of the noblest sentiments of this young man was that which he expressed to his companions, thus : " Although I know death is before me, yet I feel something within " (and here he placed his hand on his forehead) " telling me that God will give me the grace to bear whatever suffering awaits me ; I trust in His aid and goodness." He was then tied to the beam and the fire kindled, which soon ended his martyrdom and sent his soul to the judgment-seat of God, purified as gold in the furnace. Father le Vacher was present, and gave him absolution while suffering his cruel torments.

" Behold, gentlemen," exclaimed Saint Vincent in relating this martyrdom, " how a Christian has acted." <sup>1</sup>

Other martyrdoms were no less beautiful. " Not very long ago," writes Father Guérin in 1646, " in order to compel a poor woman to renounce Jesus Christ, these barbarians gave her more than five hundred lashes. Not content with that, two of them trampled on her till at last she gloriously ended her life for Jesus Christ." The same Father Guérin wrote in June 1647 : " We have here a little boy from Marseilles, aged thirteen years, who since he was captured has endured more than a thousand strokes for the faith of Jesus Christ. To force him to renounce it they tore the flesh off his arm and then condemned him to four hundred lashes or to become a Turk. I went at once to his master, and throwing myself on my knees before

<sup>1</sup> Abelly, vol. i. pp. 374-376.

him, begged of him to relent. He consented to surrender him for two hundred piastres, but not having that, I had to borrow at interest a hundred crowns, and a merchant gave me the rest." In another letter to Saint Vincent, Father le Vacher says : "A vessel having been shipwrecked off Tunis, six men who were saved fell into the hands of the Moors, who sold them as slaves. Some time afterwards the Bey, wishing to make them Turks, forced two of them by beatings to renounce the faith of Jesus Christ. Two others bravely died under their sufferings rather than consent to such infidelity. The remaining two were in such danger of losing the faith that we felt bound in charity to come to their assistance, and so have arranged their release by paying six hundred piastres, for two hundred of which I am responsible. They are now at liberty. For my part I should prefer to suffer in this world than to witness their apostasy, and would willingly give my life, nay, a thousand lives if I had them, rather than permit Christians to lose what Christ has purchased for them by his death."<sup>1</sup>

It was not only for their faith that the poor slaves died, but also to preserve their purity and chastity. "I must tell you," writes Father Guérin to Saint Vincent, "that in August 1646 a second Joseph was sacrificed in Tunis. He had resisted the most violent solicitations of his master's wretched wife, and had received over five hundred lashes on account of her false reports about him. Finally he gained a glorious victory in preferring to die rather than offend God. For three days he was chained in prison, where I visited him and exhorted him to suffer anything rather than be faithless to God. He went to confession and holy communion, and expressed those sentiments to me : "Father, they may persecute me as they wish, I will die a Christian." When brought to the place of execution he again went to confession, and God gave him the consolation of my being present at his death—a privilege rarely granted by those barbarians. His last words as he raised his eyes to heaven, were : 'O God, I am innocent.' He died most courageously, never showing the slightest impatience under his cruel torments. We paid the greatest honours to his remains. His wicked accuser was not long without receiving her punishment, for her master on returning immediately had her strangled. This young man, aged twenty-two, was a Portuguese. I invoke his aid, and as he loved us on earth, I hope he will love us no less in heaven."<sup>2</sup>

Another martyrdom no less beautiful took place shortly

<sup>1</sup> Abelly, vol. i. p. 403.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* p. 388.



afterwards. "A young slave being solicited and almost forced by his master to commit a terrible sin, resisted courageously, and in the end, in order to escape, hit his assailant in the face. Then the wicked man in his rage went to the judge, and accused the slave of attempting to murder him. Instead of condemning the master for his cruelty, the slave was sentenced to be burned to death—a martyrdom he bore with the greatest fortitude."<sup>1</sup>

"Two young Englishmen," writes Father Guérin, "have been converted, and they are an example to all the other Catholics. There is a third only eleven years old; he is one of the most amiable children and one of the most fervent Christians. He continually invokes the Blessed Virgin, that through her he may obtain the grace to die rather than deny Jesus Christ. This his master uses every means to make him do, having twice beaten him unmercifully for that end. On the last occasion he said to his master whilst he was beating him: 'Cut off my head if you will, for I am a Christian, and will never be anything else.' He has protested to me several times that he would expire under the blows sooner than deny his divine Saviour. His whole life is beautiful, especially at an age so tender; I may truly say he is a temple of the Holy Spirit."<sup>2</sup>

We shall conclude with the following history of two friends. "There were at Tunis two children, about fifteen years old, one born in France, the other in England. Both had been carried away from their country, and sold to two masters who lived near each other. Age, neighbourhood and similarity of fortune united them so closely that two brothers could not love each other more. The English boy, who was a Lutheran, was converted by his French companion. He was instructed by Father le Vacher, and so confirmed in the faith, that when English merchants came to Tunis to ransom the captives of their religion he boldly declared that he preferred to live and die a slave rather than renounce the Catholic faith.

"These two young friends saw each other as often as possible. Their conversations usually turned upon the happiness of always preserving their faith, and of courageously professing it without fearing the torments to which they might be subjected. It would seem that God was thus preparing them for the trials which awaited them. Their masters, urged on by the evil one, redoubled their cruel treatment in order to force them to deny Jesus Christ. They carried their cruelties to such an extent that sometimes the brave boys lay on the ground more dead

<sup>1</sup> Abelly, vol. i., p. 388.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*, p. 396.

than alive. The young French lad having been one day overwhelmed with blows, and left for dead on the spot, his companion, who often stole away to console him, found him in this pitiable state. He called him by his name to ascertain whether he was still alive. The sound of the voice awoke him from his insensibility ; but as he was not perfectly conscious of what had happened, and did not know why he was called, his first words were a profession of faith : ‘ I am a Christian for life,’ he exclaimed. At these words the little English boy threw himself at his feet, and bruised and bloody as they were, kissed them with respectful tenderness. Some Turks, who surprised him in the act, having asked what he was doing, ‘ I am honouring,’ he replied, ‘ the members which have suffered for Jesus Christ, my Saviour and my God.’ Irritated by such an answer they drove him out with injuries, which was an additional affliction for the French lad, who was consoled by his presence. As soon as he was able to walk he paid a visit to his friend. He found him in the same condition in which, a short time before, he had himself been found ; that is to say, stretched upon a mat, half dead from the blows he had received, and surrounded by Turks who feasted on the cruel spectacle. At the sight his courage and faith were excited, and he asked his friend, in presence of the infidels, which he loved better, Jesus Christ or Mahomet. ‘ Jesus Christ,’ replied the English lad ; ‘ I am a Christian, and I will die a Christian.’ The Turks became desperate at this language, and one of them, who had two knives in his belt, threatened to cut off the French boy’s ears. He had already advanced to do it, when the young hero took the instrument from him, himself cut off one of his ears, and asked the barbarians if they would have him cut off the other. He was ready to do so, to show his veneration and love for his religion, and his determination to die rather than deny it.

“ The courage of these two young Christians so astonished the infidels that they gave up all hope of making them abandon the faith of Jesus Christ. They spoke to them no more of religion, and God, having thus tried their fidelity, took them to himself the following year. They died of a contagious malady, and went to wear in heaven the crown which they had so nobly won on earth ”<sup>1</sup>

Such faith and heroic courage delighted the heart of Saint Vincent de Paul. He poured forth his joy and gratitude in his letters, and congratulated the missionaries with the greatest

<sup>1</sup> Abelly, vol. i., pp. 398-400.

enthusiasm. But, O God, what expense, what fatigue, what sweat and blood were necessary to gain such results! "Alas!" wrote Father le Vacher, "how far more usefully would even a part of the millions which are spent in vanities and delicacies be employed here in aiding these poor souls living in such misery! I have endeavoured, by the grace of God, to assist the men and women as far as in me lies. In this country we must buy with ready money the permission to aid these poor unfortunates, and pay a large sum even to be allowed to speak to them. We have likewise to pay when we want the galley slaves released in order that they may come one by one to confession and to receive holy communion." The same holy priest wrote on another occasion: "Two galleys set out last winter having on board five hundred Christian slaves. All of them, thank God, were put in the state of grace before starting. Oh, how sad a voyage that must have been for them, and how many lashes they received! The French slaves are no better treated, but they are criminals, while the slaves in Barbary suffer for no other reason than because they are Christians and faithful to God. The day on which those poor slaves communicated I entertained them at a modest feast, and gave to each galley a store of white biscuits for those who might become ill on the voyage."<sup>1</sup>

Where was money for all this to be found? But Saint Vincent de Paul always found it. To this work alone the Duchess d'Aiguillon at one time gave 14,000 livres, and at another 40,000. A business man of Paris, who concealed his name, came one morning to Saint-Lazare and gave 30,000 livres. And how shall we reckon the small sums which came in every day? France was moved, and could no longer refuse help. Thus Saint Vincent was able to release twelve hundred of the most abandoned slaves, and to send to his missionaries for the solace of those unfortunate captives nearly 1,200,000 livres.

But the redemption of these captives cost not only money but blood. Almost every day Saint Vincent learned of the sufferings or martyrdom of one of his missionaries. "We should be burned," wrote Father Novelli, "if the Turks caught us exercising our religion." Again: "We could not attempt to go out in our habits without being followed by a crowd who stoned and spat upon us." While going to the galleys Father Guérin was met and almost strangled by a mob. One day Father le Vacher was summoned before the Bey. "Leave the city," said he to him, "and never put foot into it again. I

<sup>1</sup> Abelly, vol. i., p. 391.

have learned that by your artifices you prevented some of the Christians from embracing our religion." Father Guérin was detained in prison for a month, with the intention of ultimately burning him. In a word, all the missionaries were constantly exposed to be burned, to the lash, or to some other torment, and thus they lived in fear and trembling. When they did not die of exhaustion or of blows they succumbed to pestilence. Father Novelli, as we have said, died at the age of thirty, having had only one year of labour among the slaves. Fathers le Sage and Dieppe, who were sent to fill the vacancy, died the next year, carried off by fever. Father Guérin, who had narrowly escaped the block, died in his turn, only regretting that he was not martyred. "He was one of the noblest souls, the most detached from creatures, and devoted to God and his neighbour, that I have ever known. 'Oh, what a loss to the poor and to us!' exclaimed Saint Vincent."

Pestilence only lasted for a time, but not so with the injustice and cruelty of the Turks. The title of consul was no exemption; on the contrary, it was an additional danger. Feeling secure at such a distance from France, the Beys of Algiers and Tunis neglected nothing to embitter the consul's position and thus force him to vacate it. We have already seen that Father le Vacher was ignominiously chased from Tunis. On another occasion, when a chevalier of Malta had carried off over two hundred and fifty piastres, the Bey summoned him to his presence. "You shall procure them for me," said the Bey. On the consul replying that he was not responsible, "Say what you like," continued the Bey, "but if you don't get them you shall pay for it with your life." Mr. Husson, another consul, was likewise ignominiously chased out of Tunis without any form of trial. Father le Vacher did not escape, for the cruel savages martyred him at the mouth of a cannon.

Now these consuls were the representatives of Louis XIV., men who were to uphold the dignity of France. This was a source of great humiliation to Saint Vincent de Paul, and he was advised to discontinue a work in which he vainly strove to interest Mazarin and Louis XIV. "Oh no," replied the saint to a missionary who wrote to him: "the motives you allege are insufficient to convince me that we should abandon the work which we have begun. If the salvation of a single soul is of such importance as that we should expose our lives to secure it, how can we abandon such a number on account of the expense?" He further added this beautiful reason: "Were it to produce no

other good than to show that unhappy land the beauty of our holy religion, in sending men who, leaving home and comforts, traverse dangerous seas and expose themselves to such cruelties in order to console their afflicted brethren, in my opinion such men and money would be well employed."

Far from abandoning the work for the slaves, seeing that he could no longer count on the Government, he conceived the bold idea of raising a fleet himself to chastise the Turks. He opened negotiations with an intrepid captain named Chevalier Paul. This man had risen from the ranks and attained the high post of Vice-Admiral of the Fleet in the Levant. Saint Vincent met him one day at Cardinal Mazarin's, and confided to him his project. Such a bold expedition was highly pleasing to Chevalier Paul, who listened to the plan with the greatest enthusiasm. Saint Vincent immediately set about collecting money, and in order to make the undertaking doubly safe, procured from Cardinal Mazarin and Louis XIV., through the Duchess d'Aiguillon, an understanding that the expedition would bear a quasi-official seal. A number of the saint's letters at this period are to encourage Chevalier Paul, and concerning the necessary preparation "I beg of you," he wrote to Father Get, Superior at Marseilles, "to see the chevalier on my behalf, and to congratulate him; say that he alone could undertake such a work, and that his courage and talent give reason to hope that the enterprise will have a happy issue . . . You probably shall have heard of the treatment of Brother Barreau, consul at Algiers, and you might remark to the chevalier that such insults to France will be put an end to by him; in fine, that no work could be more pleasing to God."<sup>1</sup> Again he writes: "I have been consoled by the letter in which you tell me that you went to Toulon and saw Chevalier Paul. It seems to me that you could not have acted more prudently than you did. I thank God, sir, that you have found this man so disposed and ready to go to Barbary to do as you say. I am deliberating whether I should write to thank him, but I feel I cannot adequately express my esteem and admiration for him. I shall content myself with saying mass, to thank God, and to beseech His divine goodness to preserve him for the welfare of the State, and to bless his aims more and more."<sup>2</sup>

Everything was almost ready, when Saint Vincent died, and the expedition fell through. But the project did not die with our saint. Revived by the pious Duchess d'Aiguillon, transmitted

<sup>1</sup> "Letters," vol. iv., p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*, p. 76.

by her to the Duke of Beaufort, and taken up still more vigorously by Tourville, it was first put into execution by Admiral Duquesne. He bombarded Algiers, and forced the Turks to capitulate. This aroused the enthusiasm of Christians, especially in France. Bossuet, in his funeral oration of Queen Marie-Thérèse, thus speaks of it: "Before Louis, France, almost without a navy, vainly kept the seas; now from the rising to the setting of the sun her victorious fleet covers the ocean, and French valour spreads terror everywhere. You shall yield or fall before this conqueror, Algiers, rich with the spoils of Christianity. In your avaricious heart you said, 'I hold the seas, and the nations are my prey.' The swiftness of your ships emboldened you, but now you shall be attacked under your very walls, like a wild bird in his rocky nest as he carries his spoil to the young. Louis has already rent asunder the chains that bound his subjects, born to be free. Your houses are no longer but a heap of ruins. In your brutal fury you turned against yourself, and know not how to glut your fruitless rage. But we shall end such brigandage, and the astonished mariner shall cry out, 'Who is like unto Tyre!' and yet she is to be conquered by the armies of Louis."<sup>1</sup> Alas! a hundred and fifty years had yet to roll by before all these patriotic plans of Saint Vincent were realised by the grandson of Louis XIV. Speaking of Blessed Pierre Fourrier, Lacordaire said: "God be praised! in a village curé is found the heart of a Roman consul." With still greater reason we may say: "In a poor old man of eighty-five is found the heart of a king."

The children of Saint Vincent, ever faithful to follow in the footsteps of their father, continued to labour for the assistance of the slaves in Barbary, down to the year 1830, when the capture of Algiers put an end to the Mussulman pirates.

<sup>1</sup> Bossuet, vol. xii., p. 513.

## CHAPTER II.

SPREAD OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE MISSION—SAINT VINCENT  
SENDS HIS PRIESTS TO IRELAND, SCOTLAND, POLAND, ITALY,  
AND MADAGASCAR.

AT the same time that Saint Vincent de Paul was sending some of his priests to sustain Christians groaning under the heavy yoke of the Turk, he was sending others to Ireland and Scotland to aid Catholics suffering cruel persecutions at the hands of Protestants. Innocent X. suggested this idea to our saint, who readily acceded. Saint Vincent, during his long life, had witnessed England's extraordinary religious instability. For fifteen centuries Catholic, she had, as a nation and without resistance, abandoned her ancient faith at the bidding of her King, the wretched and apostate Henry VIII. Twenty years afterwards, under Mary, with the same facility, she returned to the Catholic faith. Again, when Elizabeth succeeded, England adopted Protestantism, and now she was ready under Charles I. to return to the true religion. Charles was about to marry Henrietta of France, and the Catholics of England did not conceal their joy. By an act of imprudence for which she paid dearly, the young Queen made her solemn entry into London, surrounded by bishops and priests, among whom were Father de Bérulle and twelve Oratorians. By the marriage contract it was stipulated that full liberty was to be given to the Catholic religion, and the Queen's first act was the erection of a beautiful chapel in her palace. "On the arrival of the Queen," says Bossuet, "Catholics breathed more freely. The chapel which she had built, gave to the Church its ancient standing, and this worthy child of Saint Louis, nobly sustaining the reputation of Catholic France, reanimated those around her by her example and her prayers. The Oratorians, led by the illustrious Cardinal de Bérulle, and the Capuchins, were zealously reviving the true worship, and restored to the altars their becoming decoration. The zealous priests and religious, those indefatigable pastors of the afflicted flock, hitherto poor and wandering all over the country, came now to resume their holy functions in the chapel of their Queen. The Church, till then persecuted, and scarcely free even to deplore its past glory, was made to boldly

repeat the canticles of Sion in a foreign land. Conversions were innumerable, and eye-witnesses testified that in the Chapel Royal over three hundred converts were received, not to speak of others who abjured their errors.”<sup>1</sup> A bishop publicly officiated in the heart of London, and confirmed eighteen thousand Catholics.<sup>2</sup> It seemed a bright future, and Bossuet says so in his funeral oration of the Queen: “If my judgment does not deceive me, comparing the past with the present, I presume to think, and I notice the wise concur with me, that the days of darkness are passing, and those of light returning.”<sup>3</sup>

It was to advance this movement that Innocent X., at the request of the Queen, directed Saint Vincent to send some of his missionaries, of whom he had heard such wonders. Our saint hastened to obey; but instead of sending them to England, where already the Oratorians, Capuchins, and Jesuits were labouring, he divided them into two parties, and sent one to Ireland and the other to Scotland.

From the time of Henry VIII., Ireland had begun her long martyrdom. Neither promises, threats, confiscation of property, nor even death was sufficient to tear from her her liberty and her faith. After partial insurrections to throw off the hateful yoke, she was about to make, in 1641, a supreme effort. By the summons *Pro Deo, et rege et patria!* she showed that it was not her intention to separate from England and the King, but that in their union she wished to preserve her liberty and her faith. The war was declared just and equitable by a national council assembled at Kilkenny, but the issue of the contest was unhappy. Ireland was overpowered by superior forces. She saw her lands seized, her bishops and priests condemned to death, her sons and daughters shipped to America, and the noble defenders of her cities shut up in dungeons. But what violence against the faith! Since the marriage of Henrietta of France with Charles, Ireland had hoped for better times for the religion to which she had always, even at such sacrifices, so gloriously clung. It was therefore just the moment for the arrival of the Congregation of the Mission. To console the victims, to sustain the weak, to prepare the future martyrs—here indeed was a beautiful field of labour for the zeal of the Vincentians. As the Duchess d’Aiguillon had furnished means for the African missions, so did Mmes. Lamoignon and de Herse for the Irish. Eight Vincentians, five of them Irishmen, set out for Limerick and Cashel. The

<sup>1</sup> Bossuet, *Œuvres*, vol. xii., p. 445.

<sup>2</sup> Michelet, *Histoire de France*, vol. xi., p. 262. <sup>3</sup> Bossuet, vol. xii., p. 446.



bishops of these two sees had earnestly petitioned for the priests of the Congregation of the Mission. At Limerick the success of the missionaries was most marked. People came not only from the cities, but from the surrounding district, in order to hear the sermons, which were "simple, clear and pathetic," and the catechetical instructions, which were "familiar and solid." They likewise came to make general confessions, and it was computed that the missionaries heard twenty thousand. Sometimes it was necessary for them to remain days and even weeks in the same place, so great was the number anxious to make a general confession. It was the same at Cashel and the other towns, where they heard eighty thousand general confessions, not to speak of other blessings which they brought on the places they visited. Of those we must always remain in ignorance, inasmuch as Saint Vincent forbade the missionaries to write an account of their labours, saying, "It is enough that God knows what is being done; besides, the blood of these martyrs shall not be forgotten with Him, and sooner or later it will bear its fruit in new Catholics."<sup>1</sup> That prophecy was fulfilled. Soon afterwards, when Cromwell was named Protector, new and terrible persecutions were in store for the Irish Church. The missionaries had to fly and to conceal themselves as best they could, but the fruits of their labours did not depart with them. Not a single Irish priest abandoned his flock, but stood faithfully by it till his people were banished or hanged because they would not deny the faith. The Mayor and three of the principal men of Limerick were hanged. They mounted the scaffold clothed in their robes, to manifest to all the joy they felt in dying for God, and they addressed those present in words that drew tears from all, even from the heretics. They declared that they died in defence of the Catholic religion, and by their example strengthened others in their resolution to suffer anything and everything rather than prove faithless to God.<sup>2</sup> Such noble deaths have not been in vain. Encouraged by the remembrance of them, Ireland has withstood three centuries of robbery and persecution, and to-day she is as Catholic and as faithful as ever.

The entry of the Priests of the Mission into Scotland in 1651 was more difficult. Scotland had not defended her faith like Ireland, but had yielded at the first stroke. The so-called Reformation had taken a firm footing in the country, and Knox and his disciple Melvil lost no time in setting fire to churches, banishing or massacring bishops and priests, and offering large

<sup>1</sup> Abelly, vol i., p. 418.

<sup>2</sup> Abelly, vol. i., p. 417.

sums of money for the capture of even a single priest. The Priests of the Mission therefore embarked from Holland instead of Calais, to attract less notice, and arrived in Scotland disguised as merchants. A young Scotch Catholic named MacDonnell acted as their guide and interpreter. Soon, however, he was recognised by an apostate priest, and had to hide himself. The two Vincentian missionaries Father Duggan and Father White then deliberated, and came to the conclusion that the safest course was to separate. Father White remained in the mainland, while Father Duggan went to the Hebrides. The priests having been banished from these islands, apostates were sent in their place, but the poverty was so great that they soon disappeared, and for fifty years the people had lived without religion, priests, worship, even in ignorance of the very name of our Saviour. Persons of eighty and a hundred years were to be met who had never been baptized.<sup>1</sup> Father Duggan, assisted by two men—one to row the boat, or on land to carry the vestments, the other to act as catechist and servant—began to go from island to island. His journeys were sometimes four or five leagues, over rough and heavy roads, and often before mass. The life he led was indeed heroic. “One meal a day, consisting of rough oaten bread with a little cheese or butter. Sometimes, when travelling in lonely mountain districts, he had absolutely nothing. Never, or almost never, had he wine, for it was only to be found with the rich, and the accommodation was so wretched as to disgust one. Then he could not procure meat, except to purchase a whole sheep; and how was he to carry that on his journeys? Fish was plentiful, but the people were either unable or unwilling to procure it.”<sup>2</sup> Fortunately, spiritual consolation sustained him amid such poverty. At Uist he converted the lord of that island, Donald Macdonell, his wife, children and all his dependants. At Eigg and Canna he converted eight or nine hundred, while at Moidart, Arisaig, Morar, Knoydart and Glengarry all were converted and ready to receive instruction. There were six or seven thousand souls in this district, who were so far away that they were almost inaccessible. At Barra the people were so naturally religious that it was most astonishing. “It was sufficient,” writes Father Duggan, “to teach the Our Father, Hail Mary and Creed to one child in each village, and in a few days all the inhabitants, both old and young, would know it. I have received the principal persons into the Church, and among others the young lord and his brothers and sisters. Among these converts is the

<sup>1</sup> Abelly, vol. i., p. 464.

<sup>2</sup> Maynard, vol. iii., pp. 45-46.

son of a minister, whose devotion gives great edification. I usually defer holy communion for some time, in order to have an interval after the general confession, so that they may be better instructed and disposed for a second confession, and to excite in them a greater desire and love of holy communion.”<sup>1</sup> Father Duggan was preparing to go still farther, as far as Pabbay, where the difficulties and dangers were even still greater ; but God was satisfied with his good intentions. Like Moses about to enter the Promised Land, like Saint Francis Xavier in sight of China, Father Duggan died in sight of Pabbay, on May 17, 1657. He was buried in the island of Uist, and a chapel is dedicated to his memory.

Saint Vincent de Paul learned of this missionary's death with profound grief, and at once announced it to his Congregation. “Father Duggan has died while labouring in the Hebrides, where it may be said he worked wonders. These poor islanders, both old and young, have deplored him as their father. We must remain in ignorance about the fruit of his labours, or rather what God has effected by him, for people are obliged to write of religious topics in very obscure terms, on account of the English, who cruelly persecute Catholics, but still more so priests, when they discover them.”

During all this time Father White was living concealed in the mainland of Scotland, and going at night from house to house consoling the Catholics by the sacraments and words of encouragement. “I went even,” he writes, “to the Orkney Islands, and have already visited the counties of Moray, Ross and Caithness, where there has not been a priest for a long time, and scarcely a Catholic. But just as I was beginning my labours I had to desist at once, in consequence of a new and violent outbreak against the Catholics at the instigation of the ministers, who had obtained from Cromwell a mandate addressed to all the judges and magistrates of Scotland. It was as follows : ‘It has been represented to us that many persons, especially in the South, have passed over to Popery. Desirous of stopping this, the judges are commanded to make diligent search, particularly for priests, whom they shall imprison, and at once punish according to law.’” Father White was soon arrested and put in prison. “We recommend to your prayers,” writes Saint Vincent de Paul, “our dear confrère, Father White. While labouring in the mountain districts of Scotland he was taken prisoner, together with a Jesuit, by the English heretics. They were brought to Aberdeen, where

<sup>1</sup> Abelly, vol. i., p. 468.

Father Lumsden shall not fail to visit and console our dear confrère. There are many Catholics in Scotland who do all they can for the poor suffering priests. This good missionary now runs the chance of being a martyr. I know not whether we should rejoice or be sad ; for on the one side God is honoured in the state in which he is detained, since it is for His love ; and the Congregation will indeed be happy if God finds him worthy of the martyr's crown ; and he himself also, to suffer and sacrifice everything, as he does, for God. Behold how God acts. When some one has served Him in an heroic degree, He gives him the cross, suffering and shame. Ah, gentlemen and my brothers, there must indeed be something beyond our comprehension in persecution, since God usually repays His noblest followers by afflictions, imprisonment and martyrdom. He does so in order to elevate to a high degree the perfection and glory of those who give themselves perfectly to Him."

It was the law that a priest should not be put to death, except if arrested in the act of saying mass. Now such was not the case with Father White, so he was released, but on condition that if he were discovered preaching or baptizing, he should be hanged without further trial.<sup>1</sup> This threat was not enough to frighten the zealous missionary, and he again set out for the mountain districts. "We must thank God," immediately wrote Saint Vincent, "for thus delivering His servant, and also for having among us one who is found worthy of suffering so much for God. This noble missionary was not deterred by the fear of death, but returned at once to preach as before. Oh, what reason we have to thank our Saviour for having given to this Congregation the spirit of martyrs ! What a grace ! What a divine and dazzling light to be enabled to see the greatness of dying, like our Lord, for our neighbour ! Let us thank God, then, and beseech Him to bestow on each one of us this same grace to suffer and to die for the salvation of souls."

While Saint Vincent de Paul, like the general of an army, was sending his best followers to confront the horrors of Algiers and Tunis, and the dangers in Ireland and Scotland, he was asked by Marie Louise de Gonzagua, the new Queen of Poland, to establish some of his priests in her kingdom. This princess had been a member of the Ladies' Association of Charity, and also under the direction of our saint. Hence, at the same time that she was introducing French art, literature, fashion and taste

<sup>1</sup> Father White's portrait hung in Invergarry Castle, in a chamber known as "Mr. White's room," until the castle was burned down in 1745.

into her court, she also wished Saint Vincent to send her his Priests of the Mission, the Sisters of Charity and the Nuns of the Visitation. Our saint, who had a paternal tenderness for the young Queen, chose as the leader of a band of missionaries Father Lambert, his assistant, and a man of tried virtue, of exceptional humility, prudence, and heroic self-sacrifice. Though the saint, now in his seventy-fifth year, deeply regretted being separated from a man upon whom he felt confident in relying, yet he did not hesitate to give him to the Queen of Poland. With Father Lambert he joined some other priests of great virtue, and they at once set out for Poland (1651). After experiencing difficulties, of which it is useless to speak here, they arrived in Poland while a plague was at its height. The Queen was anxious that the missionaries should remain away from the affected districts, but Father Lambert, feeling that his post was amid the plague-stricken, at once set out for Warsaw, where the pestilence was raging. Her Majesty wrote immediately to Saint Vincent: "The noble-hearted Father Lambert, seeing the distress our people were in, insisted on going to Warsaw to aid the poor. I have given orders that he should be lodged at the castle, in the King's apartments. I receive news from him every day, and I am urging him not to expose his life. He has everything necessary, and I am pressing him to come here as soon as possible. Were it not for the plague, our designs should have been accomplished by this time. The Sisters of Charity, I am glad to say, arrived two days ago." These Sisters began with an act of virtue which might have wounded the Queen, but only served to edify her. After a few days' rest she said to them: "It is now time to begin our work. I see you are three, so I intend to retain Sister Margaret, and allow the other two to go to Cracow for the service of the poor."—"Ah, madam," replied Sister Margaret, "what is this you are saying? The three of us must serve the poor; you have plenty who can attend on your Majesty. Permit us, madam, to act as God demands of us, and as we do elsewhere." The Queen persisted in her arrangement; but seeing the Sister beginning to cry, she said, "What! Sister, do you refuse to serve me?"—"Pardon me, madam, but we have given ourselves to God to serve the poor." Moved to tears, the Queen then allowed the three to set out to help the plague-stricken.

But soon the pestilence was the least of their dangers, for now war broke out. And what a war! Russia, with her immense army of Cossacks, on the one side, and Protestant Sweden, with the

veteran troops of the great Gustavus Adolphus, on the other. On the one side Greek schism, on the other heresy, and between them Poland. The Queen boldly set out with the King, but she wished that Father Lambert, in whom she had every confidence, should accompany them. He did so, though worn out by fatigue in the midst of the plague, and soon, notwithstanding the anxious care of the Queen, he died the death of a saint on January 31, 1653. Saint Vincent at once wrote to all the houses: "The good Father Lambert died on January 31, having been only three days ill, but so grievous was his malady that it would be impossible for him to hold out any length of time. He received all the sacraments from Father Desdames. The Queen's confessor has informed me that the sorrow is universal, and it is the opinion of all that it would be difficult to find a more worthy ecclesiastic. It might be truly said of him, that he was, '*Dilectus Deo et hominibus, cujus memoria in benedictione est.*' He sought God alone, and nobody in so short a time won such esteem and favour with their Majesties. He was a universal favourite, for everywhere he passed he left the odour of his great virtues. These are the sentiments of this great doctor; and the Queen herself has written me a long letter extolling our confrère's virtue, and concluding with these words: 'In fine, if you do not send me another Father Lambert I shall no longer be able to do anything.' Such words show the esteem she had for him."

To replace Father Lambert St. Vincent chose Father Ozenne, a missionary of exalted virtue, and desired him to start at once. He arrived in Poland just at the moment that the political situation was becoming more and more grave. Protestantism, already supreme in England, Denmark, Sweden, and Holland, favoured by Richelieu and Mazarin, was now on the point of taking possession of Poland, and thus of dominating Europe. In the midst of these misfortunes we may hear the sighs of Saint Vincent de Paul: "O, gentlemen! does it not seem to you that God wishes to transfer His Church into other countries? Yes, if we do not change, it is to be feared that He will take her away, for we are witnessing these powerful enemies of the Church forcing their entrance. We ought to fear that God has raised up for our punishment this tyrant King of Sweden, who in less than four months has invaded a good part of this great kingdom. God made use of these our enemies before for the same end. The Goths, Visigoths, and Vandals came from these regions, and God made use of them twelve hundred years ago to chastise His Church. From what we see at present we

ought to be on our guard. A kingdom of such extent invaded within a space of four months ! O Lord ! who knows what is in store for us ? ” Every day our saint received letters which told of the sickness, fatigue and exhaustion of the sisters amid the ravages of the plague, and of the robbery and violence used against the Priests of the Mission. Fathers Ozenne, Desdames, and Duperroy were subjected to frightful indignities, being despoiled of their very clothes. The saint made use of these examples to stimulate the virtue and self-sacrifice of those who remained in Paris. “ Behold, gentlemen,” he said, “ how indifferent these priests are to life or death, but humbly resigned to the will of God. They show no sign of impatience or complaint ; on the contrary, they seem ready to suffer still more. Are we in the like sentiments ? Are we prepared to endure the trials which God shall send us, to stifle the promptings of nature, and to live no longer but for Jesus Christ ? Are we ready to go to Poland, Barbary, or the Indies, to sacrifice our ease and our lives ? If we are, let us thank God ; but if not—if there are some who fear to abandon their comforts, who are so tender as to complain when they want for the least thing, so careful about themselves that they wish to change their houses and employments because the air does not suit them, the food is too poor, or that they have not sufficient liberty to go here and go there : in a word, gentlemen, if there are some still slaves of nature, fettered by the pleasures of sense, like this miserable wretch now speaking, who, at the age of seventy, is still worldly—if there are any such, let them be convinced that they are unworthy labourers in the vineyard of our Lord.

“ But, gentlemen, what have they suffered in Poland ? Famine, pestilence even twice, and war. God is proving them by every trial. And we are to be here like cowards without courage or zeal, to see others expose themselves to danger in the service of God, and we remain weak and cowardly ! Oh, what misery, what wretchedness ! Let us take a resolution, then, of consuming our strength in God’s service. Do you not desire it, my dear seminarists, brothers, and students ? I shall not ask the priests, for, of course, they are all so disposed. Yes, my God, we wish to correspond to the designs you have upon us. I know not, gentlemen, how I have said all this to you ; I did not intend it ; but I was so moved by what has been said, and, at the same time, so consoled at the graces which God has bestowed on our priests in Poland, that I wished your hearts should share the sentiments which fill my own.”

Another day he said : “ Happy, indeed, are our confrères in Poland, who have suffered so much during the recent wars and the pestilence, and who are suffering still, in order to bring comfort and consolation to the poor ! Happy missionaries, whom neither shot nor shell, bayonet nor plague, has been able to drive out of Warsaw, where the sufferings of others detain them. They have persevered, and are doing so still, amid so many dangers and sufferings, and all that through the spirit of mercy and charity. Oh, how happy they are to employ so usefully this moment of life ! Yes, this moment, for life is but a moment that passes like smoke. Alas ! near eighty years have I lived, and those years seem now as a moment, as a dream, and nothing remains but remorse for lost time.” If that is not eloquence, where would it be ? If that is not humility, forgetfulness and contempt of self, zeal and self-sacrifice, where shall we find them ?

The political aspect of the time was turning Saint Vincent’s thoughts to the subject which was then occupying the minds of all great men—a fear that the Catholic faith was being lost to Europe. “ No doubt, gentlemen,” Saint Vincent would say, “ the Son of God promised that He would be with His Church till the end of time, but He has not promised that His Church would be in France or in Spain. He has undoubtedly said that He would not abandon His Church, and that she should remain till the consummation of the world in some place or other ; but He does not say where. If there was one country more than another which might seem to have a prior claim, it was the Holy Land, where He was born, began His Church, and worked so many miracles. Notwithstanding, it was from this chosen land that He took His Church to give it to the Gentiles. Oh ! what joy it should be to God if, amid the ruin of His Church by the upheaval of heretics and the licentiousness of concupiscence, some persons should be found offering themselves to plant elsewhere, if we must so speak, the remnant of His Church, and others to defend and guard the little that remains. O Saviour ! What a joy to you to see such faithful servants and guardians of what remains to you still ! O gentlemen ! What a reason to rejoice ! Conquerors leave a part of their troops behind to guard what they have, and send others forward to extend their empire. So ought it to be with us. We ought here to bravely hold and preserve the interests of Jesus Christ and His Church, and at the same time to constantly labour to make known His name and His Church in far-distant lands.”

Sustained by such a man and such a saint, nothing was able to



daunt the Priests of the Mission in this hour of Poland's trial. They founded seminaries, missions, parishes, hospitals, and thus aided this afflicted nation to traverse the most frightful persecution any people could know, and to preserve the faith.

The entrance of the Priests of the Mission into Italy was not accompanied by such trials ; for now in a Catholic country, like all who came to work for religion, they were greeted with joy. They soon settled at Rome, Turin, Genoa, and Viterbo, giving missions with extraordinary success, establishing the Tuesday Conferences, and directing spiritual retreats. The Pope wished that they should prepare the students for ordination. In fine, everywhere they spread an odour of sanctity, so much so that the Pope many times publicly expressed his satisfaction.

But extensive as were these missions, embracing Europe and a part of Africa, they were not enough to satiate the zeal of Saint Vincent de Paul. He yearned to evangelise the world. According as he saw the West losing the faith, he desired to propagate it in the East. "I assure you," he wrote to Father d'Horgny at Rome, "that I feel a great longing to spread the Church in infidel countries, for it seems to me that God is by degrees withdrawing it from here, and that in a hundred years or so the Church shall barely exist in these countries. Our depraved morals and those ever-increasing new doctrines are the cause of this. By such heresies the Church has lost within the last hundred years most of the kingdoms of Sweden, Denmark, Norway, England, Scotland, Bohemia, and Hungary. Italy, France, Spain, Ireland, and Poland are all that remain, and even of them France and Poland are tainted with the heresy of other countries. Now, if the Church has lost so much in a hundred years, there is reason to fear that in another hundred all Europe shall have been lost, and hence I esteem those happy who are enabled to extend the kingdom of Christ elsewhere." Again he writes : "Have we not reason to fear that God will deliver Europe into the hands of the heretics, who are attacking the Church and doing such damage that only a small portion of her remains intact. To add to the misfortune, what remains seems likely to be divided in consequence of these new opinions that are springing up every day. What shall become of us if God should transfer His Church to the infidels, who perhaps live more morally than the majority of Christians, who have nothing less at heart than the mysteries of our holy religion ? For myself, I must say those have been my sentiments for some time past."

Everywhere he sought apostles. He wished to see them

labouring in Persia, Egypt, and the Indies. He deplored that the congregation was still too few in numbers to afford missionaries to fill the East. In the meanwhile, at the suggestion of the Pope, he hastened to send a contingent of his priests to Madagascar. In this large island, 450 leagues long and 160 wide, there were between four and five thousand savages scantily clad and living in awful degradation. Besides, the island was so unhealthy that for a long time it was known as the White Man's Grave. Saint Vincent chose for this mission many of his most eminent priests. To begin with Father Nacquart, "he was eaten up with a desire for the foreign mission," and with him the saint sent Father Gondrée, one of his best missionaries, humble, charitable, affable, exact and zealous, "for whom I cannot adequately express my esteem." Then there were Fathers Bourdaise, Dufour, Prévost, and de Belleville, all of the highest virtue, and most experienced in the functions of their vocation. All these spent their lives in extending the kingdom of Jesus Christ in Madagascar.

The letter in which Saint Vincent makes known his appointment to Father Nacquart, the leader of this first band of missionaries, is extremely beautiful. "It is now a long time since God first inspired you with the holy desire of rendering Him some signal service. When it was proposed at Richelieu that missionaries should be sent to the idolaters, it seems to me that our Lord inspired you with this vocation, as you, together with some others of the community there, wrote to that effect. It is time that the seed should bear its fruit. The Nuncio, by the authority of the Propaganda, of which the Pope is the head, has chosen our Congregation to serve God in Madagascar. We have selected you as the most acceptable oblation which we could offer to our Creator, to render Him service in Madagascar with another good priest of ours. O my dearest confrère! What sentiments fill your heart at this news? Is it not confusion at receiving such a grace from heaven—a vocation as high and as admirable as that of the great apostles and saints of the Church—the eternal designs of God accomplished in you in time? Humility alone is capable of supporting such a favour. In gratitude for such a grace you should abandon yourself, all you have, and all you are, with unbounded confidence, into the arms of your Creator. You have need of great generosity and invincible courage. Your faith should be like Abraham's, and your charity like St. Paul's. Zeal, patience, humility, poverty, retirement, discretion, integrity of life, and an ardent desire to consume

yourself in the service of God, all these are as requisite for you as for the great Saint Francis Xavier."

The saint then goes into detail concerning the virtues which are necessary : faith and purity, which have a particularly good effect on those poor people, though they themselves are so viciously inclined ; devotedness to the Catholic Church and respect for her teachings. He concludes with these words : " You shall be subject to us, but possess full powers from the Nuncio, who has this work very much at heart. I am with you in spirit, and would be in person but for my unworthiness. At least, I shall pray every day that God may spare me for you, and in His mercy grant that I may see you again in heaven and honour you among the apostles. I shall conclude, prostrate in spirit at your feet, and begging of you to implore our common Lord that I may be faithful unto the end, and finish in His love the course which leads to life eternal." The saint adds in a postscript : " What more can I say except to pray to God to bestow upon you a share of His charity as He has done of His patience. I only wish that, were it lawful, I should go to be your companion instead of Father Gondrée."

The voyage was long and dangerous, and they experienced two terrible storms. But what were even these dangers to the frightful fatigues which awaited the heroic missionaries in Madagascar. Father Gondrée was the first to succumb. After baptising six hundred, and leaving behind him the perfume of his piety, sweetness and devotedness, he died in peace and tranquillity. Father Nacquart thus writes of him to Saint Vincent :—

" About Rogation time, M. Flacourt, the Governor, was about to make a journey of some leagues, and desired to be accompanied by one of us. Father Gondrée set out, and suffered much, not only from the excessive heat, but also from scanty food, only taking a little rice and water, in order not to break the abstinence. This so weakened him that he returned with a fever and great pains in his joints. He bore all these sufferings, however, with the greatest fortitude and most Christian spirit.

" As his malady continued to get worse and worse, I administered to him the Holy Viaticum and Extreme Unction, which he received with the most tender devotion. His only regret was having to leave the poor infidels. He urged our countrymen here to have a great fear of the judgments of God and devotion to the Blessed Virgin, to whom he himself was particularly attached. He desired me to write to you, sir, and to thank you most humbly, in his name, for the favour you did him in admitting him into the Congregation, and especially in choosing him, before so many others

more worthy, to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ in this island. He also wishes that our confrères should give thanks to God on his behalf. On two occasions he warned me to be prepared to suffer great things here for Jesus Christ. Then having spent a part of the night in making continual aspirations to God, he died peacefully only fourteen days after his illness began. He was interred the next day, amid the tears of our countrymen, and even of a great number of the poor infidels, who said that they had never met till our arrival any missionaries who were not violent and vicious, and who taught them heavenly doctrine with such affection and sweetness as the deceased.

“You may well imagine how my poor heart feels at the loss of him, whom I loved as myself, and who, after God, was my only consolation here. I asked our Lord to give me a part of the virtues of the deceased, that I might be enabled to do the work of two. Since his death I have felt the effect of his prayers, and a double strength of mind and body enables me to labour for the conversion of these poor infidels and for the advancement of God’s glory in this country.”

On learning of Father Gondrée’s death, Saint Vincent hastened to send new missionaries to aid Father Nacquart, now left alone to groan under the burden. But, alas! when they arrived it was only to find him whom they fondly hoped to work under, in his grave. “O sir!” wrote Father Bourdais, “words fail me to adequately express the sorrow of my poor heart. God only knows our sighs and our tears when on our arrival we found Father Nacquart dead, he who was to be to us another Joseph to receive us as his brethren, another Moses to lead us into this desert.” Then the missionary adds: “Shortly afterwards the loss of Father Mousnier, whose zeal consumed him in less than six months, was more than I could bear without support.” This ungrateful soil devoured all its labourers. “Father de Belleville died *en route*. Father Prévost, after surviving the dangers of the voyage, died on his arrival. Father Dufour only lived long enough to show his loss. In fact, all your children that have been sent here, are now passed away. I alone am left to tell the tale.” Notwithstanding all this, Father Bourdais begged Saint Vincent not to lose courage. “If,” he says, “we had only two or three priests, I believe the whole island should be baptized within a year. Our saint did not stand in need of encouragement. “That man of God, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, knew full well that all these adversities were but proofs of God’s providence, trials of His love. Hence, bracing himself up

under the blow that might have proved fatal to a heart less courageous than his, he resolved to continue, with the aid of grace, his only hope and strength, the work which he had so well begun. He said : 'The Church was established by the death of the Son of God, strengthened by that of the apostles, popes, and martyred bishops. Her children were multiplied by persecution, and the blood of martyrs was the seed of the Church. God usually tries His chosen servants. His goodness makes it clear that He wishes now as ever to establish the kingdom of His Son in all nations. It is evident that these people were disposed to receive the light of the Gospel, when six hundred of them were baptized by a single priest, and it would therefore be against all reason and charity to refuse this missionary's request for aid, and to withhold the instruction which is all those poor people ask.'

"These and similar considerations made him resolve to send towards the end of the year 1659 four priests and a lay-brother, who, despising danger and death, had urged him to allow them to go and labour in this difficult mission."<sup>1</sup> These five missionaries left France, but Providence wished that they should be forced to return to Paris in eighteen months. Their vessel was wrecked off the Cape of Good Hope, but fortunately all were saved.

"Saint Vincent was dead when the news of this last accident arrived, which certainly would have afflicted him beyond measure. Thus of the twenty who at different periods had embarked for Madagascar and endeavoured to establish there the empire of Jesus Christ, seven had died, including Father Bourdaise, and the remainder obliged to return by the hidden and inscrutable designs of Providence."<sup>2</sup>

In sending his missionaries to Madagascar, Saint Vincent had placed them on the route to America, the Indies, China and Japan. Now in his eighty-fifth year, he was no longer able to leave his arm-chair, but his great heart and mind traversed those far-off regions which he longed to evangelise. We know that he constantly was thinking of sending missionaries to Persia, Egypt and Brazil. He even thought of China, as we see from the letter of a missionary who four years after our saint's death asked leave to go there. "If you obtain this permission, after Madagascar I shall go to China, Japan, and other infidel countries, in order to open the way for our Congregation to labour there as it does in Europe. It was also the intention of our blessed Father that I should pass into China." Almost all these missions have since been realised ; but Saint Vincent sees them from his throne in heaven.

<sup>1</sup> Abelly, vol. i., p. 447.

<sup>2</sup> Abelly, vol. i., p. 451.

## CHAPTER III.

### SPREAD OF THE SISTERS OF CHARITY—SAINT VINCENT GIVES THEM RULES.

1655.

THE spread of the Sisters of Charity had not been as rapid as that of the Priests of the Mission. If we except Poland, where a house was founded at Warsaw in 1652, the sisters had not gone outside of France. Even there they had only fifty houses, but they were asked for on all sides, and the numerous letters from bishops which crowded in upon Saint Vincent plainly showed that the hour for their extension had arrived. Let us see the progress which they had already made.

Founded in 1633 to aid the Ladies of Charity, they gradually rose from that secondary position by reason of their humility, modesty and devotedness; and without desiring it, or even realising it, they imperceptibly effaced the Ladies of Charity. In the same manner they entered the hospitals; at first that of Angiers, "where it was felt that a special blessing seemed to attend their services towards the sick." This explains the importunity of the Bishop of Angiers to have them in a second hospital. Saint Vincent, notwithstanding their fewness, could not refuse him. Soon, despite all resistance, it was necessary to provide them for hospitals at Nantes, La Fère, Cahors and Metz, where the Queen was anxious "that they should exhibit the holiness of the Catholic religion to the numerous heretics and Jews there." They were also placed in hospitals at Ussel, Narbonne, Sainte-Menehould, and finally, in five or six hospitals in Paris, where they increased as if by magic, to the great consolation of both doctors and invalids.

To pass from the ordinary hospitals to those for the galleys only required a little more devotedness, and that was not wanting to the Sister of Charity. But here, too, the initiative was not taken by themselves. It came from the Ladies of Charity, who soon felt that though their visits, accompanied by the distribution of money and food, were a consolation and even a benefit to the galleys, yet they were not enough. To induce these unfortunate creatures to suffer patiently, to cease blaspheming God and man,

the tender care and devotedness of the Sisters of Charity could alone suffice. They spoke to Saint Vincent, who had a predilection for the galleys, and to see them entrusted to the Sisters in Paris, Marseilles, Toulon and Algiers, afforded him a joy which he could not conceal.

At the same time, and by the same force of circumstances, the foundlings gradually fell more and more into the hands of the Sisters of Charity. After the second great crisis, which we have related, it became evident that if the Sisters did not take entire control the work would soon collapse. For the moment they hesitated, for Mlle. le Gras felt the burden too heavy ; and moreover, where was she to procure the necessary funds ? When, however, the great Foundling Hospital was established she hesitated no longer, and the Sisters of Charity brought to the work of the foundlings that tender devotedness which has characterised them ever since.

Thus it was that each year brought new works for the Sisters of Charity. After the foundlings came the elementary schools. We have seen that they undertook this labour in 1641, and they have never since relinquished it. It was a work of predilection with Margaret Nazeau, the first Sister of Charity. To teach the young to speak and write, to enable them to gain their livelihood, and while doing that, at the same time to rear them in piety, purity and faith—"nothing," said Saint Vincent, "is more worthy of a Sister of Charity. O sisters ! you ought to instruct yourselves, in order to be able to teach the little children. In this you ought to be very careful, since it is one of the designs you should have in consecrating yourselves to God."

We must not forget, too, a service which the Sisters of Charity were beginning to render to society, a rare and most beautiful example of devotedness—their heroic services on the battlefield. During the great wars they had showed themselves valiant workers, and they could no longer be done without. Petitions for them came in from all sides. "O sisters !" said Saint Vincent, "behold the Queen requests that you should go to Calais to take charge of the wounded soldiers. How you should humble yourselves, seeing that God deigns to make use of you for such great ends. Men go to war to kill one another, and you, sisters, you go to repair the evils which they have done. Oh, what a blessing ! Men kill the body, and very often the soul, and you, you go to restore life, or at least by your care to assist in preserving it. To have courage to go among soldiers, to visit the wounded, not only in France, but even in Poland, ah ! where can we find a parallel ?

Was such a thing ever heard of before? For my part, I must say that I know of no society that has done what God does through yours."

Of the four sisters whom Saint Vincent had sent to Calais two quickly succumbed. "I recommend to your prayers," says the saint, "the Sisters of Charity who were sent to Calais to assist the wounded soldiers. Two of them, although they were the strongest, have died. Think, gentlemen, of these four good sisters among five or six hundred wounded soldiers, and admire therein the goodness of Divine Providence in raising up such a company to meet the wants of our time. The Queen has done us the honour of writing to ask for others to be sent. Now four are going to start. One of them, aged about fifty, came to me last Friday at the Hôtel-Dieu, saying that she had learned that two of our sisters had died while tending the wounded, and that she was ready to be sent if I thought well of it. I replied that I would think the matter over. Yesterday she returned to receive my reply. See, gentlemen and my brothers, the courage of these sisters to expose their lives, as victims, for the love of Jesus Christ and their neighbour. Is it not truly admirable? All I can say is that these sisters will be our judges, if we are not ready like them to expose our lives for love of God." Such splendid fruits and unforeseen success rejoiced the heart of Saint Vincent, who attributed all to God.

Is it not surprising, then, that the Sisters of Charity were asked for on all sides. "You would hardly believe," writes Saint Vincent, "how God blesses these good sisters everywhere. One bishop has asked to have them for three hospitals, another for two, and a third is also urging me to send them to his diocese." In another letter the saint goes into greater detail. "The Bishop of Saint-Malo is extremely desirous of employing the sisters in his city, but at present this cannot be done, as Mlle. le Gras has none to spare. It is the same with the Bishops of Cahors, Toulouse, Angiers, and many other places."

Soon France, even Europe, was not sufficient for their zeal. "The name of the Sister of Charity has spread almost everywhere. It is known in Madagascar, where they are urgently requested, and our missionaries who are there, write to say that they yearn to see them co-operating in saving those poor souls." The start was given. "Most of our sisters," says Saint Vincent, "do not wish to hear of any setting out for Madagascar without them;" and looking to the future, the saint remarked "that the day would come when they should be sent to Africa and the Indies."



Thus the Sisters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul were taking up their positions at the different posts assigned to them by Divine Providence, in view of the revolutions and catastrophes of modern times. Thus they were beginning to exhibit those marvellous qualities which have won for them the reputation of being heroines of charity, as well in war as in peace.

So far, however, they had not written rules. Saint Vincent was now in his seventy-ninth year, and everybody feared that he should die without giving the Sisters their formal constitution. Mlle. de Gras was in feverish disquietude each time Saint Vincent fell ill. "I always notice a little of the human spirit in you," writes the saint, "for you think that all is lost when you see me unwell. O woman of little faith! Why have you not more confidence and acquiescence in the example of Jesus Christ? The Saviour of the world resigned Himself to the will of His Father for the welfare of His Church; and you, for a handful of Sisters whom God has raised up, you think He will be wanting to you! Go, mademoiselle, humble yourself profoundly before God."

But if St. Vincent did not hurry to put the rules in writing, he was, nevertheless, constantly thinking of it. He was slowly maturing in his mind every detail. Already he had determined upon and actually put into execution one of the most essential points. But there were others, especially two very delicate rules, not yet decided. The first was: To whom should the entire government of the Sisters of Charity be confided? Should it be to his successor, the Superior-General of the Congregation of the Mission, which seemed very natural, seeing that the two Companies had the same spirit? Or should it be to a Superior named by the Archbishop of Paris, as is the custom with the Carmelites, the Nuns of the Visitation and many other orders? Urged by humility and a spirit of entire obedience to the bishops, Saint Vincent adopted the second plan, and in 1646 petitioned the Archbishop of Paris to erect the Sisters of Charity into a society, under the direction of a priest named by him. Cardinal de Retz, who was the Archbishop of Paris, cordially received this request, and named the saint Superior-General of the Sisters during his life. On the saint's death, the Archbishop reserved to himself the right of naming another. The next step was to have the deed registered by Parliament in the ordinary way, and the King was ready to give the letters-patent. But it was then that a singular event took place, in which some have seen, and not indeed without reason, the finger of God. The deed, signed

and countersigned, by M. de Méliaud, parliamentary secretary, was lost, and was sought for many years, but in vain. It was necessary, then, to prepare another, which was not ready till eight years afterwards, 1655. Mlle. le Gras, who could not bear to think that a day should come when her daughters should no longer be governed by the successor of her venerated father, profited by this long interval to induce Saint Vincent to change his mind. Why separate two institutes which had the same founder, the same end, and which ought to have the same spirit! At least, might not the Archbishop select one of the priests of the Congregation of the Mission as Superior? If it were otherwise, was it not to be feared that among those selected to govern some might be found who, not having their spirit, should lead them astray and ultimately cause their ruin? This is what Mlle. le Gras wrote to Saint Vincent in 1646, what she repeated to him again and again in 1647 and 1651, and, finally, what she placed before him in a detailed account, to which she added so humble and ardent a supplication that Saint Vincent yielded to her wishes. Thus he again petitioned the Archbishop of Paris, but this time asked that the Superior-General of the Congregation of the Mission should always be the Superior-General of the Sisters of Charity. Cardinal de Retz graciously consented to this on January 18, 1655. "Inasmuch as," says our saint's former pupil, "God has blessed the care and labours which our well-beloved Vincent de Paul has expended for the success of this pious design, we once more by these presents confide and commit to him the government and direction of the said society of Sisters of Charity during his life, and after his death to his successors, the Superiors-General of the said Congregation of the Mission." This deed was approved and confirmed, first by the King, and afterwards by the Pope.

Now that this first difficulty was removed—and thanks to Mlle. le Gras—in a manner that two centuries have proved the wisdom of, it was necessary to solve a second problem. Under the Superior-General of the Congregation of the Mission, the Sisters of Charity further required a Mother-General, who should direct from Paris the houses of the Sisters spread all over the world. Where was this Mother-General to be taken from? Was it to be from the Sisters of Charity themselves? But they had been created as auxiliaries of the Ladies of Charity, to do the work which the latter were unwilling to undertake. Now, among these young girls could one be found capable of directing the others? Was it then to be from the Ladies of Charity that

a Mother-General should come? These ladies had every qualification—intelligence, experience, devotedness, and grand connections which would insure high patronage. That was all very well. But was it likely that these grand ladies, almost all married, with children and a large household to look after, would be able to govern a society that was increasing every day? And even if they had time, would they possess that spirit of poverty, simplicity and mortification which ought to be impressed upon the minds of the Sisters? For all these reasons Saint Vincent decided that the Mother-General should be taken from the Sisters of Charity themselves. Besides, from the time of their first formation the character of these young girls had changed very much. A large number of distinguished ladies had joined, and some of the leaders of fashion were heard to regret on their death-bed that they had not worn the humble habit of a Sister of Charity.

Here, then, was to be made of life of the Sisters of Charity, and which for ten years they had practised: they were not to be religious in the strict sense—not to make perpetual vows, but only for one year; they were to use the secular dress, and not to have special chaplains or confessors. Such were their rules, and all that remained was to put them in writing. This, St. Vincent, now in his seventy-ninth year, and full of wisdom, experience, and virtue, did in the course of the year 1655. When he had completed them he wished to afford the Sisters the pleasure of a solemn distribution, and with that in view, assembled, on May 30, 1655, all those who were then in Paris or its vicinity. He addressed them almost in these words: “My dear Sisters, it would seem that by uniting you, Providence wishes that you should honour the sacred humanity of Jesus Christ. Oh, how advantageous to live in community! for each member participates in the welfare of the whole body, and thus receives more abundant graces. Although living in common up to the present, you have not received your rule of life. In that Divine Providence has acted towards you as He did towards His people, whom He left without the law for more than a thousand years. Our Saviour did the same when founding His Church; for as long as He was on earth there was no written law, and it was the Apostles who, after His departure, collected His teachings.

“Now it is important that I should give you a rule before I go. Some one perhaps has said that as long as I remain there is no necessity for a rule. My dear Sisters, that is not the way with the works of God. You should have, indeed, a poor support in a

wretched creature. Your strength ought to be in Providence, who has made you what you are.

"Hitherto you have not formed a distinct and separate body from the Ladies of Charity. But now, sisters, God wishes you to form a particular body, which, without being entirely separated from the Ladies of Charity, shall have, nevertheless, its own peculiar exercises and functions. God wishes to bind you more strictly by the approbation which He has permitted his Grace the Archbishop of Paris to give to your rules and manner of life." (The saint then read the text of the petition and its approbation.)

"The first article of your rules says that your Company shall be composed of widows and young girls, who shall elect one from among themselves to be Superioress for a term of three years ; that this Superioress can be re-elected for a second term of three years, but no longer. This is with the understanding that it is not to take place till after the death of Mlle. le Gras." Here Mlle. le Gras fell on her knees and begged Saint Vincent that it should take place immediately. "Your sisters and I," replied Saint Vincent, "should pray to God to preserve your life for many years to come. He generally preserves by extraordinary means those who are necessary for the accomplishment of His works ; and if you advert to it, for ten years it may be said that the preservation of your life, mademoiselle, has been almost a miracle."

Then he continued : "You shall be known as the Sisters of Charity, servants of the sick poor. Oh, what a beautiful title ! It is as much as to call you servants of Jesus Christ, since He considers as done to Himself whatever is done to His members. Besides, He never did anything else but serve the poor.

"It was our wish that it should be said of you what was said of our Lord, that He began to do and then to teach. What you have just heard, is it not what has been practised among you for twenty-five years ? Is there anything in it which you have not done ? No, through the mercy of God you have acted thus before being commanded, at least in express terms ; for the late Pope advised this, but now you do so because it is enjoined upon you.

"I told you on a previous occasion, sisters, that whoever embarks on a long voyage should be acquainted with the rules of navigation, which should be strictly observed, otherwise he is in danger of being lost. It is the same way with persons who are called by God to live in community ; they run a great risk of being lost if they do not observe their rules. By the mercy of God, I believe that there is not one among you who is not in the disposition to practise them faithfully. Is that not so ?"—"Yes, Father."

"When Moses gave the Law to the people of Israel, they received it on their knees as you are now. I sincerely hope through the infinite mercy of God that He will second your desires and grant you the grace to do His will. Sisters, do you not give yourselves to Him with your whole hearts to live in the observance of the rules which He has granted you?"—"Yes, Father."

"Do you desire to live and die in the observance of them?"—"Yes, Father."

"I beg God in His sovereign goodness and mercy to shed abundantly every grace and blessing on you, that you may perfectly accomplish His holy will by the practice of your rules. I beg of the Blessed Virgin to ask her dear Son to give you the graces necessary for this. Most Holy Virgin, we beseech you to assist this Company. Continue and perfect this work, which is the greatest in the world. Intercede for these here present, and for those that are absent. And O my God! I beg of you to grant us grace through the merits of Thy Son our Saviour Jesus Christ."

Here several of the sisters asked pardon for the faults which they had committed against the rules; after which the saint added: "I beg of God with all my heart, that He will pardon you all your faults. And I, wretch that I am, who do not keep my own rules, I beg pardon of Him, and of you also, sisters. How many faults have I not committed in your regard, and in that which concerns your work! I beg you to implore God's mercy for me. On account of my unworthiness I will implore Our Lord to give you His blessing Himself, and I will not pronounce the words to-day."

Here Saint Vincent kissed the floor; and Mlle. le Gras and all the sisters, greatly distressed that their Father should refuse to give them his blessing, entreated him with so much earnestness that at last he granted their request. "Pray to God, then, sisters, that He will not regard my unworthiness, nor the sins of which I am guilty, but that He will show mercy to me; and now, may He shed His blessing upon you while at the same time I pronounce the words, *Benedictio Dei Patris*," &c.

Thus terminated that memorable conference in which shone the kindliness, the simplicity and humility of the Father, the self-sacrifice and holy zeal of the Sisters of Charity, and which was as the launching of a mighty ship destined to sail on every sea.

Two months afterwards, August 8, 1655, another assembly was held, composed of all the sisters then in Paris, with the object of electing persons to fill the responsible offices of the community. Although, according to the rules, the election should follow the plurality of votes, yet the occasion was so important that Saint

Vincent determined to name the sisters himself. Julianne Loret was appointed First Assistant ; Mathurine Guérin, Treasurer ; and Jeanne Gressier, Bursar. These nominations were written on parchment, and Mlle. le Gras, together with the sisters, signed it. Saint Vincent placed his name at the end of the document, and sealed it with the seal of the Congregation of the Mission, which represents Jesus Christ with His arms extended as if ready to receive all who came to Him. This precious document is still to be seen in the Archives Nationales in Paris.

Now that all this was accomplished, it would seem that Saint Vincent had, at least in this quarter, finished his work. He had made Mlle. le Gras Mother-General of the Sisters of Charity, and had given them as their spiritual director Father Portail, his first, his dearest and most saintly disciple. He therefore felt that he might rest assured as to the future. But how was he to leave his dear Sisters of Charity ? Neither his eighty years nor the multiplicity of his affairs, his enormous correspondence nor his tottering limbs, were sufficient to prevent him from going to see them. When eighty-four it was necessary to lead him to his arm-chair, but once there he forgot his age and infirmities, and so bright was his spirit that in his familiar and charming simplicity was an eloquence that went straight to the heart. Like an artist who touches and retouches his work to complete its finish, so Saint Vincent came every Wednesday to explain to his dear sisters the rules which he had given them. "To-day, my dear sisters, I will begin the explanation of your common rules. They are so called because all the Sisters of Charity must observe them in whatsoever place or office they may be, not only in Paris, but also in the country, in the parishes, the hospitals, among the galley-slaves, the insane, the foundlings—in fine, everywhere." What a beautiful list—charity adapting itself to every misery, and as universal as misery itself.

The saint explains how all these works had their origin, and how God recompensed the devotedness of the sisters by entrusting them to them. "You, sisters, have given yourselves to God to assist the sick poor, not in one house only, as is done by the Sisters of the Hôtel-Dieu, but everywhere, as our Lord did without exception, for He assisted all those who had recourse to Him. God, seeing this, has said, 'These sisters please Me, they have acquitted themselves well of this employment ; I will give them a second, which is to take charge of abandoned children, who have no one to take care of them.' Seeing that you have embraced this second employment with such charity, He says, 'I

will give them still another.' Now, what is this other? It is the assistance of the poor galley-slaves. O sisters! what a happiness to serve them who are abandoned to those who have no pity on them. I have seen those poor victims treated like beasts. Then, again, God has confided to your care the insane. We must honour in them the wisdom of a God who wished to be treated as a fool. We know not whether we shall live long enough to see any new employments given to the Company, but assuredly God will give them if you act uprightly, as I hope you will."

Thus as a recompense for their self-sacrifice towards the poor, the sick, the galley-slaves and the insane, the saint hopes that God may deign to use them to soothe miseries, if possible, still more appalling. Surely this is divine!

But to acquit themselves worthily of such functions it was necessary that the Sister of Charity should love and esteem her rules more than anything else. "It is these rules that ought to guide you more than any others, however good, or even better, in appearance. Would it be praiseworthy to see a bishop act as a Carthusian? Undoubtedly not, for then he would not act as God wishes. It would be the same with you, if, for example, you desired to follow the maxims of the Carmelites, while your spirit is to work for the neighbour.

"The blessed Bishop of Geneva said to me one day: 'Sir, I told our sisters to believe that all other orders were better than theirs, but, at the same time, to love their own rules better than any others. I desire even that they should believe their rules holier and better for them;' and then he gave me this illustration: 'Just as a child thinks his own mother more beautiful than any other, and though she may be deformed, yet loves her more than a queen, so our sisters should love their community more than all the others.'"

These rules, which he regarded as so important, Saint Vincent explained down to the least detail, and although only thirty-four have been transmitted to us, yet in the last years of his life he gave near two hundred conferences on them, dwelling upon each point more emphatically than ever.

Fearing for the sisters because of the praises which would certainly be evoked by their charity and devotedness—the more dangerous on that account—he sought to humble them more and more. There was to be no distinction; all were to be equal. It was his wish that there should be no Superioress in the houses; the very name was enough to frighten him. "Superioress! of whom or of what?" said he. "If it is necessary to have one, it

should be to give an example of virtue and humility, to be the first to do everything, the first to cast herself at the feet of the sisters, the first to apologise, and the first to surrender her own opinion for that of another." Together with humility, he urged again and again the holy virtue of poverty. They were to be poor in their dress, all the more so because of their lowliness. Some sisters returning from Angiers and Nantes complained that they were ridiculed because of their head-dress, and asked that they might adopt that of the locality. "It comes to this," replied Saint Vincent, "that they will have as many different hats or bonnets as there are cities and countries. Now, sisters, we see strangers here dressed according to their own fashion; and do they think of changing their costume because they are looked at and remarked? Before we became accustomed to the Capuchins, did we not find them so strange that we knew not what to compare them to? But did they change their dress? Certainly not. We have also seen persons from Poland dressed according to the custom of their country, and nobody wondered that they did not adopt the French costume. Hence you must not be astonished if people wish you to change and adapt your costume to that of the places to which you shall be sent. But under no pretext should you do so." Poverty was always to be practised in their food, even in time of sickness. "Sisters of Charity cease to be such if, when ill, they wish to be treated delicately. What they give to the poor, their lords and masters, is what they should expect. If they desire better, it would be to ask for what is above their state and what belongs only to ladies of the world. Because the Company makes a vow of poverty, its members ought to be treated accordingly.

"After that, what more can I say? With what do you think they nourish kings when they are sick? Eggs and soup; that is what they give them. God granted me the favour of assisting at the death of the late King. The doctor begged him to take some nourishment, but he refused on account of the repugnance he felt and because he saw that death was fast approaching. Calling me, he said 'M. Vincent, the doctor wishes me to take some nourishment, which I have refused, since I am dying. What do you say?'—'Sire,' I replied, 'the doctors have advised you to take food, because it is a maxim among them always to make the sick take something, as long as there remains a breath of life, hoping always for a favourable change; therefore, sire, it will be better to do as the doctor directs.' This good King immediately submitted, and called for some soup. So that, sisters, if you



have eggs and soup you are treated in the same manner as the greatest people on earth."

With humility and poverty, to which the saint constantly returned, he insisted especially on the peace, union and cordiality which ought to reign among the sisters. A house without these virtues is a hell. It is true, no doubt, that to have this union, sacrifices must be made, and faults and failings patiently borne. But which of us has not faults? And would it be reasonable to expect others to bear with us if we are not willing to bear with them? "This is what I often recommend to our missionaries, and I recommend it also to you, sisters. There is no one who does not need forbearance and support, and indeed we must beg others to overlook our drawbacks. I often ask the missionaries to bear with me, for there is no one who has greater need of support than I." (The saint said this with such humility and confusion that all were astonished.) "I sometimes wonder how they can bear with my disposition, my impatience and my other defects; and I often beg of them to put up with me and not to mind my miseries."

In addition to humility, poverty and union among themselves, the saint constantly recommended a sweet unrestraint, a modest liberty. This he desired to establish at any cost. "You, sisters, frequently go into the world; you treat with all classes of persons; do so with simplicity, candour, with an upright intention and a pure heart." If Saint Vincent did not wish that his daughters should be religious, as he constantly said, he wished that they should be even holier than religious, more hidden by their modesty, able to leave their houses to visit the sick, but more enclosed at home than a Carmelite in her cell.

Why did Saint Vincent labour so earnestly to fill the Sister of Charity's soul with that angelic purity, chaste liberty, that devotedness and detachment, that poverty and insensibility to all things worldly? For the sake of the poor; to serve them. "The poor are your masters and mine," he often repeated. "Oh, how beautiful is the soul of a Sister of Charity that is attached to the poor! It shall shine as the sun."

A thousand and a thousand times had Saint Vincent expressed these sentiments, but he continued to repeat them till his last breath. Like Saint John, in his old age unable to say any more than "Love one another," Saint Vincent, now in his eighty-fifth year, had these words always on his lips, "Love the poor, they are your masters and mine."

Those words produced their fruit. Hardly any one realises

here below his ideal, but not so with Saint Vincent de Paul. There are few who have not met the Sisters of Charity and at once recognised in them the daughters of our saint. They have founded more than 2,000 houses, and neither the effeminacy of the reign of Louis XIV., the horrors of the first republic, nor the wretched irreligion of the third, has been able to dim their splendour. From France they have passed to Italy, Poland, Austria, Spain, Portugal, Ireland, and now to England and Scotland. They have traversed the Atlantic, and in the American Civil War their charity was rich alike for North and South. What Eastern land does not know them? At Constantinople, Smyrna, Alexandria, Jerusalem, Damascus and Algiers, they are met in the streets; they have penetrated into Persia, Abyssinia and China, and everywhere win respect and admiration, even from those who differ from them in religion.

Nothing has escaped their beneficent influence, for everywhere they went, they established crèches, hospitals, orphanages, schools and workshops. For every wound they found a balm, for every sorrow a consolation. Even a world that denies Jesus Christ and His Church, has been forced to recognise the sweet odour of their charity.

Neither time nor climate, customs nor manners, have been able to destroy the unity of that body, no more than human infirmity to weaken its spirit. After an interval of two centuries the Sister of Charity remains what Saint Vincent de Paul had made her. In a full meeting of the French Academy a bishop thus addressed an ex-Minister of Public Instruction: "When you return to Rome, sir, you will meet some of these indefatigable messengers of devotedness and consolation. Simple plebeians or illustrious patricians whom the most ancient families, the *Fabian* or *Sempronian gens*, would not have disowned, they are going to the distressed, to the wretched or the forgotten of this poor world, and toiling to bring to souls and society a better than an *Augustan* peace. They shall pass close to you, clothed in their rough habit, in the midst of the imposing ruins which repeat the history of ancient Rome from Romulus to Theodosius, and they shall remind you, sir, of those first disciples of the Gospel, whose traditions they continue. Your generous heart shall salute in them that charity which, in the name of a wisdom superior to the philosophy of Seneca and Marcus Aurelius, is ready even for the greatest sacrifices; and borrowing from the Virgilian sibyl the cry of religious emotion, you shall join with us in saying, '*Ecce Deus, ecce Deus!*' God is there, God is there!"

## CHAPTER IV.

### SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL GIVES RULES TO THE PRIESTS OF THE MISSION.

1658.

WHILE Saint Vincent de Paul was solemnly giving rules to the Sisters of Charity, he was also endeavouring to obtain at Rome the approbation of the rules or constitutions of the Priests of the Mission. There was one point, however, which retarded everything : the unprecedented form in which he wished to establish his Congregation. He did not wish that his priests should be religious. At first he hesitated to require them to make vows ; but afterwards he decided they should make simple vows, and not solemn which would constitute them a religious order. His priests were to retain the dominion of their property, but not the use, except with the permission of the Superior. They were to have the habit of secular priests, and only to be distinguished from them by their greater modesty and regularity. If Saint Vincent were asked why he was so determined that his followers should not be religious, he would have given, no doubt, good reasons ; but the source is to be found in the divine inspiration which was then making itself felt throughout the Church. Adapting itself to altered circumstances, after creating in the Middle Ages such grand and holy religious orders, this divine afflatus was now about to meet the requirements of modern times with simple Congregations, no less holy, no less fervent and no less fruitful. More exalted in sanctity than others, Saint Vincent felt before them this divine breath, which was only to be felt later on by all. At the time the older members of the Sacred College only saw in such a Congregation of priests an innovation, and therefore they refused to approve it. In vain did Father Berthe, who was sent to Rome for the purpose by Saint Vincent, endeavour to succeed. His successor, Father Jolly, should probably have also failed, had he not met in Rome Cardinal de Retz, who always remained devoted to his old tutor. The Cardinal took up the matter, and proposed it to the Pope himself.

The divine inspirations which saints feel by reason of their close union with God, are also felt by Popes, on account of their

high position and authority. Alexander VII. by a brief, dated September 22, 1655, approved the fundamental principle of the constitutions drawn up by Saint Vincent de Paul, namely, that the Priests of the Mission should make simple vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, but with this express condition, that these vows do not constitute them as a religious order : "*Atque dicta congregatio non censeatur propterea in numero ordinum religiosorum, sed sit de corpore cleri secularis.*"

Saint Vincent experienced deep joy on receiving this brief. He at once set about placing the finishing stroke on the rules and constitutions, which were so long expected, and which his advanced age rendered so necessary.

The brief was read in presence of the community of Saint-Lazare, and accepted by all with filial submission. Henceforth the difference of opinion about the new form of religious life ceased for ever, and the Priests of the Mission have always continued to make use of the same formulary of vows as that used on the first occasion.<sup>1</sup>

It is under these circumstances that Saint Vincent de Paul put the finishing stroke on the rules or constitutions of his Congregation. He was now eighty-two years of age, of eminent sanctity and consummate experience. During thirty-three years these rules had been tried before being written. On all difficult points he had consulted successively Roman canonists, theologians of the Sorbonne, parliamentary lawyers, local superiors, and even the humblest of his priests, in order to find out from them what the law permitted and what experience showed to be practicable. With what prayer, what elevation of his soul to God, had he prepared himself for drawing up these rules ! He reduced them to twelve chapters, all of which are filled with the love of God. When he had finished them he assembled the community to solemnly bequeath them to it.

"It was in the year 1658," says Abelly, "two years before his death, that Saint Vincent completed the rules of his Congregation. His great age and his almost constant infirmities made him feel that he had only a few years to live. Having loved his own during life, he wished to give them a signal proof of that

<sup>1</sup> "Ego N . . . , indignus sacerdos (aut clericus) Congregationis Missionis, coram beatissima Virgine et curia cælesti universa, voveo Deo paupertatem, castitatem, et Superiori nostro ejusque successoribus obedientiam, juxta instituti nostri regulas seu constitutiones. Voveo me præterea pauperum rusticorum salutis toto vitæ tempore in dicta congregatione vacaturum, ejusdem Dei omnipotentis gratia adjuvante, quem ob hoc suppliciter invoco."—*Archives of the Mission.*

love before his death, by leaving them his spirit expressed in their rules or constitutions."

On Friday, May 17, 1658, in presence of the community assembled in Saint-Lazare, Saint Vincent spoke as follows. Having explained in the first place why these rules were delayed, and that there was no cause for regret on that account, he continued: "If we had given rules at the very beginning, before the Congregation had acquired any experience, such a manner of acting might appear more the work of man than of Divine Providence. But all these rules, all that you now see in the Congregation, all this has been done, I know not how, for I never thought of it; all this has been introduced by degrees; no one being able to say who is the author of it. As for me, when I consider how God has given existence to our Congregation in His Church, I confess I am completely bewildered, and I seem to be in a dream. No, this is not of man, this is of God. Will you call that the work of man which the human understanding has not foreseen, nor the will desired nor sought in any way? Our first missionaries thought no more of it than I; so that all this is beyond our hopes and expectations.

"And if you ask how these practices of the Congregation were introduced, I must answer, I know not, nor can I know. There is Father Portail, who was with me from the beginning, and he can tell you that there was nothing further from our thoughts than all this. Everything came by degrees, one thing after another. The number of those who came to us increased, each one laboured for the acquisition of virtue, and good practises were imperceptibly established, that all might live in perfect union and act with uniformity amidst their various occupations. These are the practices that have always been observed, and by the grace of God are observed at present. It is thought expedient to reduce them to the form of rules, which I trust the Congregation will receive as coming from God."

Here the saint could not restrain his humility, and continued: "O gentlemen and my brothers! I am amazed when I consider that it is I that am giving these rules, but they are the work of God. The more I think of it, the more I see that it is God alone who has inspired these rules. If I have contributed ever so little, I fear that little is but an obstacle to their exact observance and to the good they are calculated to produce. It seems to me that, by the grace of God, these rules tend to withdraw us from sin, to procure the salvation of souls, to serve the Church, and thus procure the greater glory of God. Whoever observes them

properly will be free from vices and sins, useful to the Church, and will render to God the glory He demands. O Saviour! what a happiness! I cannot sufficiently realise it. Our rules prescribe a life common enough in appearance, but they are capable of raising to a high state of perfection those who practise them.

“Besides this first end, which is to seek our own perfection, there is a second, which ought to be very dear to us, for no other Congregation has ever had it, namely, to announce the Gospel to the poor country-people, to those who are most abandoned. Oh, what a subject of humiliation, that, as far as I know, there are no others who have this principal and peculiar end, to announce the Gospel to the most abandoned poor! *Evangelizare pauperibus misit me.* Our portion, then, gentlemen and brothers, is the poor. What happiness to do that which our Saviour has come upon earth to do, and by this means to ascend from earth to heaven! To do this is to continue the work of the Son of God, who went into the rural districts to seek the poor. To aid the poor, our lords and masters; such are our rules. O blessed rules! which engage us to serve the rural districts to the exclusion of cities. You see, then, that whatever the world may say, those shall be blessed who will observe these rules, because they shall render their actions and their lives conformable to the life and works of the Son of God.”

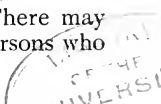
He added: “I hope that the fidelity with which you have observed these rules in the past, and the patience you showed in waiting for them, will obtain for you, through the goodness of God, the grace to observe them still more easily and more perfectly in future. O Lord! bless this little book, and bestow upon it the unction of your Spirit, that it may produce in the souls of those who read it estrangement from sin, detachment from the world, the practice of virtue, and union with Thee.”

Saint Vincent then proceeded to distribute to each a copy of the book of rules, beginning with the senior priests. He asked them to come towards him. “If I could I would spare you the trouble by bringing the book to each one in his place; pardon my misery. Come, Father Portail, if you please; you have always supported my infirmities; may God bless you.” He then gave the rules to Father Alméras and to Father Griguel, who were nearest to him, and begged the others to come for them in the order of seniority. To each Saint Vincent said a few words, always concluding with “May God bless you.” Through respect the recipients kissed the book, the hand of St. Vincent, and then,

in a spirit of humility, the ground. The distribution ended, Father Alméras, in the name of the entire community, asked the saint's blessing. Then the aged saint, assisted by those nearest to him, knelt down and offered the following prayer: "O Lord, who art Thyself the eternal and immutable law, who by Thy infinite wisdom governest the universe; Thou from whom, as from a living fountain, flow all laws that guide Thy creatures, and all rules of holy living; deign, O Lord, to bless those to whom Thou hast given these rules, and who have received them as from Thee. Give them, O Lord, grace to keep them faithfully unto death. It is in this confidence and in Thy name that, miserable sinner though I am, I shall pronounce a blessing on the Congregation: *Benedictio Domini nostri Jesu Christi descendat super vos et maneat semper. In nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti. Amen.*"

"Behold," says Abelly, "part of the discourse which Saint Vincent addressed to his community on this occasion. He spoke in a moderate tone of voice, humbly, sweetly, and affectionately, making every heart reciprocate the love which glowed in his own. They felt like the Apostles listening to Our Lord in His discourse at the Last Supper, when He gave them as their rule the commandment of perfect love."

Now that the rules were drawn up, Saint Vincent began to explain them. He did so every Wednesday to the Sisters of Charity, and every Friday to the Priests of the Mission. It was his last work, in which he poured out his whole heart, and for the last time manifested the grandeur of his faith, the depth of his humility, the fire of his charity, and the light of his wisdom crowned by experience. In December 1658 he explained the first chapter, which treats of the end of the Congregation of the Mission; and in the course of the year 1659, he spoke of the means to attain that end, and of the necessary virtues. He used the same simplicity, the same eloquent familiarity, though somewhat more incisive and tender, as when he spoke at the Tuesday Conferences. Two lay-brothers carried him to his arm-chair, and raised him when he wished to bless the community. As his voice could not reach very far, and all were anxious not to lose a word, they sat in a semicircle around. He gave a magnificent conference on the end of the Congregation of the Mission, and concluded with those words: "I shall go from you soon. My age, my infirmities, and the abominations of my life will not admit of God's enduring me on earth any longer. There may then come after my death dissatisfied and slothful persons who



will say : ‘ Why embarrass ourselves with the care of hospitals ? What means have we of assisting so many people ruined by the war, and of visiting them in their homes ? Why direct the Sisters of Charity who serve the sick, and why waste our time with lunatics ? ’ And others will say : ‘ It is too much to undertake to send missionaries to distant countries, to the Indies, to Barbary, and other foreign lands. We are willing to give missions in this country without going farther ; but as for the foundlings, the aged and the prisoners, we want nothing to do with them. ’ Gentlemen and my brothers, before I leave you, I warn you, in the spirit in which Moses warned the children of Israel : I am going away, you will see me no more ; I know that some among you will rise up to seduce others ; they will do what I have forbidden, and will not do what I have commanded on the part of God. ‘ After my departure,’ said Saint Paul, ‘ ravening wolves will come. ’ If this happens, say : ‘ Leave us under the laws of our fathers, in the state in which we are. God has placed us here, and He wishes us to remain here. ’ Hold firm, gentlemen, and my brothers. But it will be said the Congregation is embarrassed with such an employment. Alas ! if in its infancy it supported such burdens, why not do so now, when it is stronger. Leave us then in the state in which Our Lord was while on earth. We are doing what He did, and certainly no one shall be found to prevent us from imitating Him.”

His conferences on the evangelical counsels and the holy vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience were not less beautiful. This is how he speaks of poverty : “ Poverty is the bond of religious orders. We are not, it is true, religious ; we are not worthy to be such, though we live in common. But it is true, nevertheless, that poverty is the bond of communities, and particularly of ours. Yes, gentlemen, this virtue of poverty is the foundation of the Congregation of the Mission. The tongue that speaks to you has never, by the grace of God, asked anything of those things which the Congregation now possesses. And were it to establish the little Company in the provinces or in great cities, to increase its members or its employments, I would never, with God’s help, utter a syllable or move an inch. Woe, woe, gentlemen—yes, woe, woe to the missionary who shall allow himself to be attracted by the perishable goods of this life ! For he shall be ensnared ; such thorns will remain embedded in him, and such ties continue to fetter him. And should this misfortune happen to the Congregation, what then will be said ? and what sort of life will be led in it ? Individuals will say : ‘ We have so



many thousand francs income, let us then take our ease. Why go teach in the villages? Why labour so much? Let the poor country-people alone; their curés can attend to them if they wish. Let us live quietly without giving ourselves that trouble.' See how idleness will follow in the train of avarice; the only thought will be how to preserve and augment temporal goods—to gratify self. Then, indeed, may be said farewell to all the exercises of the Mission, and to the Congregation itself, for it will no longer exist. It is only necessary to consult history to find innumerable examples of how riches and abundance of temporal possessions brought about the ruin, not only of many ecclesiastics, but even of entire orders and communities, because they had lost their primitive spirit of poverty."

And falling back on himself, in one of his usual outbursts of humility, he exclaimed: "O my Saviour! how can I, who am so miserable, speak thus?—I, who have had a horse, a carriage, and who at present have a fire in my room, a well-curtained bed, and a brother to wait on me; I, of whom such care is taken that I want for nothing. Oh, what scandal I give the Congregation by my abuse of the vow of poverty in all those and other similar things. I ask pardon of God and of the Congregation, and I beg of you, gentlemen, to bear with me in my old age. I have difficulty in bearing with myself, and it seems to me that I deserve to be hanged at Montfaucon. May God grant me grace to correct myself, although so old."

The saint concluded a conference on chastity by reading the rules concerning that virtue: "It is of the greatest importance that the Congregation be animated with an ardent desire of acquiring this virtue, and make profession of practising it at all times and in all places. This is so much the more to be attended to as the functions of the Mission oblige us to an almost continual intercourse with seculars of both sexes. Therefore every one shall endeavour to use the greatest possible care and diligence, with the utmost precaution, to preserve this virtue from the least stain, both in body and soul."

After giving the motives which inspire a love and esteem for this virtue, the saint adds: "There are two sorts of purity, purity of the body and purity of the heart. He who possesses purity of the body has not, therefore, chastity. He must add purity of heart, which is the form and essence of this virtue. In truth, chastity drives away all evil thoughts from the imagination, from the memory and the mind. If we wish, then, to observe chastity as the rule requires, we should direct all our efforts against our

heart, in order to become masters, and to root out all that can give rise to any image contrary to this sublime virtue. Remember what our Lord did on so many occasions ; that He was born of a virgin ; and that to honour this virtue, He has promised that virgins shall follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth, and that they shall sing a new canticle. O gentlemen ! let the Congregation and each of its members have the greatest esteem for this virtue, and endeavour to acquire it more and more."

"But what will aid us to practice this virtue ? It is to guard the senses, the eyes, the ears and touch. Oh, it is necessary to guard our senses with the most active vigilance !" Then he recommended to fly the occasions ; to observe temperance in eating and drinking ; and industry. "Believe me, gentlemen, when the devil finds a person idle, he does everything he can to make him fall. Oh, what a fine opportunity he has to tempt and torment him by impure representations ! Make it, then, your study always to be occupied."

"Now, gentlemen, what shall we do to preserve this virtue, for the means just given will be of little avail, if we are not animated by the Spirit of God. We must, then, implore it from our Divine Lord, and have a firm wish and determination of giving ourselves in good earnest to His Divine Majesty, in order that He may preserve and perfect us in chastity, and estrange us from the opposite vice. If we labour in this way to acquire, preserve and advance in this virtue, it will be felt everywhere, and the Congregation will become most pleasing in the sight of God. May it please His Divine Majesty to grant us this grace."

Again, behold in what terms he recommended obedience ! "There must be something very excellent and divine in this virtue, since our Lord loved it so much that, from His birth till His death, He performed all the actions of His life through obedience. He obeyed God the Father, who willed that He should become man ; He obeyed His mother, and Saint Joseph, his reputed father ; He obeyed all those placed in authority, whether they were good or bad ; so that His whole life was a tissue of obedience. With it He began His life, with it He ended it : *factus est obediens usque ad mortem, mortem autem crucis*—He became obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross ; and for this reason it was *propter quod*, that His Father has exalted Him. O Saviour ? what, then, is this virtue of obedience ? How excellent it is, since Thou hast found it worthy of a God ! Oh, the beautiful example Our Lord has given us of obedience, practising it even to the death of the cross !"

“But to whom do we owe obedience? The rule commences with our Holy Father the Pope; he is the common Father of all Christians, the visible Head of the Church, the Vicar of Jesus Christ, the Successor of Saint Peter. We owe him obedience; we, I say, who are in the world to instruct the people in the obedience which they, as well as ourselves, ought to have for the universal Pastor of souls. It is our duty to set them the example, to carry the torch which will show them what they have to do and how they are to do it. For this end let us ask of God the grace to obey well, give ourselves to Him without reserve, and willingly receive as coming from Him all that happens to us. It is to the Pope our Lord addresses these words, ‘*Peter, feed My lambs, feed My sheep*’; to him He has given the keys of the Church; he is, as it were, another species of man, so much is he raised above others; we ought therefore to consider him in our Lord and our Lord in him.

“Secondly, we owe obedience to their lordships the bishops. We priests promised them obedience when we became priests, not only to themselves and their successors, but also to those in whose dioceses we have to live and labour. We ought, then, to look upon ourselves as those servants in the Gospel to whom the father of the family says, ‘Come,’ and they come; ‘Go,’ and they go. I have always made it my special care to obey the orders of their lordships the bishops; and in fact we are subject to them and depend upon them for the missions, for catechising, hearing confessions, and administering the sacraments, although of their own kindness they have left to the Congregation its own rules and internal administration. Our Holy Father has said so in his Brief, without any effort on our part, in which he lays down that, those of ours who shall be sent on missions or to conduct seminaries shall be subject to the Ordinaries, that is, to the bishops. We owe them, then, obedience as to God. I entreat those who shall be sent into the dioceses to act in this manner, and to obey them with exactness.

“Thirdly, so far for obedience to bishops. As to parish priests, is it not reasonable? What! that a stranger should do something in their parish without their consent! That would be a great irregularity. The Congregation, from the beginning down to the present, has received the grace of always agreeing with them, and of doing nothing without their knowledge and approval.”

There remains obedience to the Superior. “O wretch!” the saint exclaimed, “to obey one that is disobedient to God, to Holy Church, to my father and mother from infancy! In a manner,

my whole life has been nothing but disobedience. Alas ! gentlemen, to whom do you render obedience ? To him who, like the Scribes and Pharisees, is filled with vice and sins. But that is what will make your obedience more meritorious. I was thinking it over sometimes, and I remember that when a little boy, as my father was bringing me with him to town, I was ashamed to walk with him and to acknowledge him as my father, because he was ill-clad and a little lame. O wretch ! how often hast thou been disobedient ! I ask pardon for it of God, and for all the scandals I have given you ; I ask pardon for them of you also, and of the entire Congregation. I beg of you to ask God to pardon me those faults, and to grant me heartfelt sorrow."

But humility and charity were the two virtues of which he never tired speaking. He called them the two pillars of the Congregation. " Humility," he said, " is the virtue of missionaries. But what do I say ? I made a mistake. I would that we possessed it, and when I said it was the virtue of missionaries, I meant that it is the virtue of which they have the greatest need, and which they should most ardently desire. For this wretched Congregation, which is the least of all, should have no other foundation than humility, which should be its own peculiar virtue. Without it we shall never effect anything, either within or without ; nor shall we advance ourselves or our neighbour in virtue. Yes, I say it again : if we be true missionaries, each one of us will be glad to be considered as of poor and mean intellect, as a person of no virtue ; will be content to be treated as ignorant, to be insulted and contemned, to have his defects cast in his face, and to be proclaimed as insupportable by reason of his wretchedness and imperfection. I go further, and affirm that we should rejoice when it is said that our Congregation is useless, is composed of poor, simple persons ; that it succeeds but little in all it undertakes ; that its missions bear no fruit ; that the seminaries are without the grace of God, and the ordinations without order. Yes, if we possess the spirit of Jesus Christ we should be satisfied to be reputed such as I have said. Alas ! what is it to wish to be esteemed, unless to wish to be treated otherwise than the Son of God was ? It is insupportable pride. When the Son of God was on earth what did He say of Himself ? For what was He pleased to pass in the minds of people ? For a fool, for a seditious person, as stupid, as a sinner, though He was none of these. He even wished that Barabbas, a robber and murderer, should be preferred to Him. O my Saviour ! how Thy humility will, on the Day of Judgment, confound all sinners like me !"

The saint constantly returned to the subject of humility "For," he said, "we cannot prevail against Satan by pride, he has more than we ; but through humility we can conquer him, for of that he has none."

With humility, what he recommended most was charity. "Charity is the paradise of communities. Charity is the soul of virtues, and humility their guardian. In humble communities, charity is as a valley in which all the mountain streams unite. In proportion as we empty ourselves of self-love, God takes possession of our hearts. Let us humble ourselves, then, to think that God has deigned to make use of this wretched Congregation for the service of His Church. Nevertheless, our Company is poor in its origin, in its learning and virtue, and the lowest and least of all. I pray to God two or three times every day that He may annihilate us if we are not procuring His glory. What ! gentlemen, to wish to live and not to please and glorify God !"

Not only was this charity to be practised at home, but also outside of community life. "Our vocation is to go not into one parish or diocese, but to go all over the earth, to include all, and to imitate the Son of God, who has said that He came to spread fire on the earth, and to draw all men by His love. O Jesus ! tell us what has drawn Thee from heaven that Thou shouldst come and suffer the miseries of earth, so much persecution and so many torments ? Oh, excess of love ! to humble yourself even to the death of the cross. Where can such a love be found ? In whom but our Lord, enamoured as He was of creatures to that degree as to leave his throne of glory and come and take a body subject to infirmity, to take the extraordinary measures which He has taken for establishing in us and amongst us, by His words and example, charity towards God and our neighbour. Yes, it is that charity that crucified Him and wrought the wonderful work of our redemption. O gentlemen ! if we have a spark of that sacred fire which burned in the heart of Jesus Christ, shall we sit with folded arms and abandon those whom we could assist ?"

The saint wished that his disciples should be prepared to go to the ends of the earth, out of charity. "You would be edified were I to tell of the number of old and infirm priests who have asked to be sent to India. Whence such courage ? From a detached heart, which only seeks to make God known and loved, and remains here only through His will. If we were not attached to wretched creatures, each of us would say from his heart, 'My God, I am ready to go to any place on earth, where my superiors

judge proper, to announce your name, and should I even die I would be ready still to go, knowing that my salvation is obedience and obedience is your will.' And I, though old and wretched, should be prepared to start for India, even though I were to die on the way. For it is not health and strength that God looks for ; no, He asks only a ready will, a sincere desire of embracing every occasion of serving Him, even at the peril of our lives.

" We ought to love God with the labour of our hands, with the sweat of our brow, and to serve our neighbour at the risk of our property, nay, our very life. How happy to become poor through charity ! Yes, if God should permit that we be reduced to begging, to be homeless and wretched, and that anybody ask, ' Poor Priest of the Mission, what has reduced you to this ? ' how happy, gentlemen, to be able to reply, ' Charity.' Oh, what a beautiful object is such a priest in the sight of God and His angels ! "

Thus were escaping from the heart of Saint Vincent the treasures which his sanctity had amassed during eighty-five years. Only a few months separated him from death, and his beautiful soul seemed to receive a new light. His children pressed around him, listening on bended knees for the least whisper. Like the disciples on the way to Emmaus, they felt their hearts warmed by the words of so great a master.

## BOOK VI.

### DEATH OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL—HIS VIRTUES —HIS CANONISATION — HIS RELICS — LATEST HONOURS RENDERED TO HIS MEMORY BY THE HOLY SEE.

#### CHAPTER I.

##### DEATH OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

1660.

THE completion of the rules of the Congregation of the Mission, and of the Sisters of Charity, was a source of deep joy to Saint Vincent de Paul. When in 1645 he had a dangerous illness, he was asked if there was anything that disquieted him, and his reply was, "Nothing, except that we have not drawn up the rules." This unique disquietude was now gone, and nothing was left but to crown with a holy death a life that had been so fruitful in good works. From the very beginning of 1660 it became evident that his end was not far off. He was now eighty-five, but what alarmed his confrères most was the sudden and grave increase of his infirmities. Naturally Saint Vincent's constitution was strong, and it was well that it was so, to enable him to undergo so many labours and austerities. He had, however, two very weak points. The first was bad circulation, which resulted in what he called his "little fever;" and secondly, he suffered from a peculiar trouble in his legs, which became inflamed and ulcerated from the least fatigue. What was the cause of this second affliction, greater even than the first, and which lasted for forty-five years? Was it, as some hold, the result of his captivity in Tunis, or was it the consequence of heart-disease? Whatever may have been the cause, it assumed alarming symptoms in 1660. The saint wrote on January 11, "I can no longer go downstairs, on account of my limbs, which are worse than ever;" and nineteen days afterwards, "I cannot at present even say Mass." He was then compelled to have crutches, with which he hobbled to the chapel to receive Holy Communion; but soon they had to be abandoned, for they irritated his sores, and besides, it was feared

that a fall, if it occurred, should prove fatal. Hence his priests besought him to remain in his room.

However, he was suffering from a long-standing infirmity rather than a sudden illness, and no immediate danger was apprehended. On April 3 the saint wrote, "I can no longer go to see you, because of the weakness in my legs, but otherwise I am well."

In troubles of this nature the mind ordinarily retains the greatest clearness. This was remarkable in Saint Vincent. Seated at his little table he gave audiences and dictated letters. His secretary was Brother Ducourneau, and no less than 281 letters are dated during the last few months of the saint's life. Some of these were long, and were addressed to the Superiors in Rome, Turin, Genoa, Warsaw, and Marseilles. Others were to the Sisters of Charity, or to the Nuns of the Visitation, or, finally, to the bishops, archbishops, and cardinals, treating of the most difficult questions of administration. Throughout them all, however, are manifested the same wisdom, prudence and firmness, the same moderation and consideration for others, not to speak of the humility and other virtues which appear on every page.

Towards the middle of February two new trials arose which rendered the saint's inability to leave his room all the more painful: Mlle. le Gras and Father Portail fell dangerously ill almost simultaneously. Both received the Last Sacraments on February 14, and Saint Vincent felt keenly that he could not visit either.

Father Portail was the first and dearest of the saint's disciples. Their friendship dated back to the Collège des Bons-Enfants and the missions of Montmirail and Folleville. Since then they had never parted. Our saint had absolute confidence in Father Portail, and when his own infirmity prevented him from going out, he confided to him the direction of the Sisters of Charity. He was a man of candour, extreme modesty, and of rare delicacy of conscience, from which sprang a great fear of death and judgment. Saint Vincent constantly urged him to have confidence, and, like all pure souls, when death did come he met it without alarm.

Saint Vincent wrote on February 27: "Father Portail always had a great dread of death, but when he saw it approaching he lost this fear, as he often assured me. He died as he had lived, in the good use of suffering, in the practice of virtue, and in the desire of passing his life, like our Lord, in the accomplishment of God's will. He was one of the first two missionaries, and held



many appointments in the Congregation, which he has served with admirable fidelity. His should be a great loss, were it not that we know God disposes all for the best, and when we think we lose, then in reality we gain. We may, therefore, justly hope that Father Portail will do us more service in heaven than he should have done on earth."

He adds: "At the time of Father Portail's departure, Mlle. le Gras was also in grave danger. But, thanks be to God, who does not wish to overwhelm us with affliction, she is improving."

That improvement did not last long, for a month afterwards, on the 15th March, she died. It was the design of Providence to fill her last hour with the greatest sacrifices. Father Portail, her confessor, was, like herself, on his death-bed, and Saint Vincent was confined to his room. Seeing that she could not expect a visit from him, she thought of asking him to write some words of encouragement. But the saint, whose mind was already in heaven, knew well the detachment of which Mlle. le Gras was capable, and wished to add a new jewel to her crown by refusing her request. He merely sent one of his priests to say, "You are going before me, but I hope in a short time to see you again in heaven." That meeting was to be before six months.

The last moments of Mlle. le Gras exhibited the highest virtue. She was suffering much, but without complaint and without wishing for sympathy. "It must be so," she said, "that pain should be where sin hath dwelt. God is just, and in His justice He worketh mercy." The Holy Viaticum was brought, and by her bed knelt on one side her son, her daughter-in-law and grand child, while on the other were the Sisters of Charity. She blessed them all. Her illness being very tedious, she desired to receive Holy Viaticum again, and it was arranged that she should do so the next morning. All night she prepared herself by making the most ardent acts of love, and when she had received for the second time, she again blessed the Sisters of Charity, impressing upon them always to live in union, cordiality, and with a high esteem for their vocation, adding that were she to live a hundred years this is the only advice she should give. Her last words were, "Be ever solicitous in the service of the poor." The priest was about to give her the plenary indulgence *in articulo mortis*, but she said, "It is not time yet!" Shortly afterwards she struck her breast and beckoned them to begin, and having received the last blessing, she drew the curtains as if wishing to be alone. Five or six minutes afterwards she died, while her spiritual daughters knelt weeping by her bed. It was the opinion of the curé of

Saint-Laurent that she brought with her to judgment the grace she received in baptism. Saint Vincent was informed from time to time of her condition, and it consoled but overcame him. He was not content in speaking her praise, but the day after her death wrote a letter to each of the houses of the Congregation, to announce the great affliction which had befallen it. "I recommend," he said, "the soul of Mlle. le Gras to your prayers, though perhaps she stands not in need of them, for we feel confident she now enjoys the glory promised to those who serve God and the poor as she did."

It was the custom when any of the Sisters of Charity died, to assemble those sisters that were at that time in Paris, and speak to them of the virtues of the deceased. How the saint desired to do this now ! But amid all his emotions his infirmity was increasing, and his limbs were not only inflamed but ulcerated. It was pitiable to see him. They conjured him to allow a room next his own to be transformed into an oratory, but he would not hear of it. "No, no," he replied, "oratories are only permitted in cases of absolute necessity ; such is not my case." He likewise strongly opposed his being carried in a chair to the chapel by two lay brothers. That two men should so abase themselves was a martyrdom to him. Every time he went to chapel he asked their pardon in such an humble tone that it was necessary to give it up. It was then resolved to postpone speaking of the virtues of Mlle. le Gras till such times as he had so far improved as to be able to go the house of the Sisters of Charity

April, May, and June passed by without the desired improvement. On May 28 he wrote : "There is no news here. All are well. It is true I suffer a little from my limbs, and cannot move about without great difficulty." In the beginning of July his condition became more serious. On the 14th he wrote : "My limbs do not allow me to sleep at night, nor to walk by day, nor even to stand. Beyond that I am very well." Sister Julienne wrote about the same time : "Our most honoured Father is in very good spirits, thank God, but he can no longer move. We must be resigned to the will of God, for he shall scarcely survive next winter." This was giving him even too long, for he had only two months to live. Under these circumstances it was resolved to postpone the conference on the virtues of Mlle. le Gras no longer, and all the sisters were summoned to meet at Saint-Lazare on July 24. Everything contributed to the touching solemnity of this conference. The Sisters of Charity felt that they were now to look upon their holy founder for the last time, and that, too,

while he spoke of her whom they regarded as their mother and their model. Ever a lover of simplicity, Saint Vincent did not depart from the usual form of the conferences, but having said the *Veni Sancte Spiritus*, thus began : " My dear sisters, I thank God for having spared me till now, that I might see you thus united. You know well that I should have wished to meet you during the trying illness of Mlle. le Gras, but I was unable to do so. It was the will of God, and I believe for the greater perfection of her of whom we are about to speak. As our Lord has so recently taken from our midst the good Father Portail, a word in passing about him will not be inopportune, though we are assembled principally to speak of the virtues of Mlle. le Gras."

The saint then began, as usual, to interrogate the sisters on the virtues which they remarked in the deceased. The first sister that was called was so overcome with grief that she could not speak, and the saint passed on to another. Each one spoke of what particularly struck her in the conduct of Mlle. le Gras. One spoke of her love of the poor : " She had a great love for the poor, and took great delight in serving them. I have witnessed her assemble prisoners as they came out of prison, wash their feet, and distribute among them her son's clothes." Another of her humility : " I have seen her lying prostrate on the ground, ready to let any one trample her under foot. She washed the vessels, and ardently wished to do the other household work as much as her strength would permit, She served in the refectory, and asked pardon for her faults." A third spoke of her prudence : " I never knew a person who had greater prudence ; she had this virtue in the highest degree, and I ardently hope that the Company may also have it." A fourth of her humility and poverty : " I remarked that she greatly desired that the sisters should live in a spirit of humility and poverty. She often used to say, ' We are the servants of the poor, and consequently ought to be poorer than they.'"

Then Saint Vincent began : " You may well say that your mother had a high esteem for poverty. To be convinced of it we have only to look at her clothes. Although she was poorly clad, she thought she had too much, and wished only to be treated as a poor person. As regards the Company, it was most prudent that your good mother trained you for twenty-five years to be exact in this spirit of poverty in everything : in your dress, your food, and in all your wants. What a misfortune if any of you should relax on this point, and instead of being content with frugal fare, seek dainties ! Ah ! if unhappily any of you should

say we are not well fed, &c., my sisters, you should at once cry wolf, wolf, for such a spirit should be stifled in the beginning. My dear sisters, preserve poverty, and poverty will preserve you."

He then called some other sisters, who spoke of her charity. "She had for us all so great a charity that she seemed consumed by it." Of her purity one said, "Pure in her youth, in her marriage, in her widowhood, she wept over the slightest faults of levity, and could hardly be consoled."

By this time the sister who was called first had recovered sufficiently, and addressing Saint Vincent, said, "Father, if you think well of it, I shall speak."—"Oh! certainly," replied the saint, himself now overcome with grief. This was the sister whom Mlle. Gras had asked to admonish her of his faults. "I had great difficulty in performing that duty," she said, "for although I watched her closely I could discover none." She next spoke, like the other sisters, of the virtues of the deceased, and then Saint Vincent brought the conference to a close with these words: "Miserable sinner though I am, I beg our Lord to bless you by the merits of the blessing He gave His Apostles when about to leave them. May He detach you from everything earthly, and attach your hearts to the things of heaven."

"*Benedictio Dei omnipotentis, Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus sancti, descendat super vos et maneat semper. Amen.*"

Although this conference was very taxing on the little strength which Saint Vincent had, yet it was a real consolation to him to be able to pay, in presence of all her daughters, his tribute of veneration and gratitude to her who had so powerfully helped him in his great works. He might have seized this opportunity to say adieu to the Sisters of Charity, for he felt it was to be their last meeting; but, always an enemy of singularity, he did not even allude to his approaching death. This course he everywhere pursued, and seated at his table, he continued to dictate letters and govern his community without any apparent change in his manner. In connection with this trait of his last days a singular incident occurred. It is a custom in the Congregation that the Superiors may read the letters going out and coming in. One of the priests brought his letter to Saint Vincent, in which there happened to be the following remark: "M. Vincent is visibly declining, and it is evident we shall soon lose him." Saint Vincent was surprised when he met this, not at the news, but he felt it was a hint for him to prepare. Perhaps this good priest was disedified that he was not making more extraordinary

preparation for death, and thinking that he might not realise its approach, made use of this means to warn him. This was what Saint Vincent in his humility concluded. He sent for the priest and said : " Sir, I am extremely thankful for the good advice you have given me. It was exceedingly kind of you, and now be good enough to complete the charity by admonishing me of any other faults you may have noticed in my conduct."—" O Father ! " replied the missionary, in the greatest embarrassment, " I assure you I had no idea of giving you advice through my letter, it was quite unintentional."—" Don't disturb yourself," replied the saint, " I should have honoured you all the more had you intended to do so. Lest you might be surprised at not seeing me make greater preparation for my death, now at hand, let me tell you, sir, that for eighteen years I have never gone to sleep without having placed myself in readiness to die that night." He might have also said that for fifteen years, since his severe illness in 1645, to his night prayers he always added those for extreme unction.

August was a severe month of suffering for Saint Vincent. His legs were more inflamed and ulcerated, and matter constantly flowed from his sores. His feet could not be kept warm, and his mind, up to this so clear, was now beginning to fail. He fell asleep from time to time during the day, and even while at work could not resist the inclination. He always most humbly apologised, or sometimes with a smile he would say, " It is the brother which precedes the sister," meaning that sleep was the forerunner of death. He now resolved to say adieu to two of his illustrious benefactors. The first of these was Philippe-Emanuel de Gondi, in whose house he had been tutor for twelve years, and whose noble wife so largely contributed in life and death to the saint's charitable undertakings. When he became a widower Philippe-Emanuel de Gondi abandoned the world, and becoming a priest of the Oratory, lived there in humility and penance, rejecting even a cardinal's hat, and died in his chosen obscurity at the age of eighty. The following is the letter in which the saint bids him adieu :—

" MY LORD,—The grave state of my health compels me to take this opportunity of asking your forgiveness for any displeasure I may have given you by my want of manners, and also to express to you most humbly my exceeding thanks for your kindness towards me, as well as your innumerable acts of charity towards our little Company. Be assured, my lord, as long as God leaves me the power to pray, I shall employ it in this world and in the

next for you and yours. Desiring to be in time and eternity, yours, &c."

The second of his illustrious benefactors was Philippe-Emanuel's third son, the saint's former pupil, since become Cardinal-Archbishop of Paris, and known in history as the famous Cardinal de Retz. This man, amid all his levity, had never forgotten his former tutor, though he knew his conduct caused him many a tear. Thanks to the saint's prayers, the Cardinal was beginning to give up his worldliness, was even thinking of resigning the archbishopric, and of ending his days, like his father, in solitude and penance. One cannot but remark in this letter the saint's lively spirit of faith, which makes him forget in Cardinal de Retz the person of his former pupil and a man of many faults, only to see in him the exalted dignitary of Cardinal-Archbishop of Paris.

"MY LORD CARDINAL,—In consequence of my age and infirmities, I am inclined to think that this is the last time I shall have the honour of addressing your Eminence. I most humbly beg your Eminence to pardon me if in anything I have displeased you. I am so ignorant that I may have done so, but I have never intended it. I presume also to recommend to your Eminence this little Congregation of the Mission, which you have helped not only to establish, but also supported and favoured. As the work of your hands, it acknowledges you with grateful submission as its father and its prelate. It will always pray for your Eminence and the house of De Retz ; and if in the mercy of God I have the happiness of being admitted to the Divine presence, I shall always intercede for your Eminence. Humbly begging your Eminence's blessing, I remain, &c."

It was now the end of August, and the saint's malady was daily increasing. Should one tumour burst, it would be sufficient to crown his martyrdom. The worse he became, the less aid he wished for. "He clutched a cord fastened to a beam in his room, and amid all his terrible suffering the only words that escaped his lips were, 'Ah ! my Saviour ! my merciful Saviour !'" From time to time he cast his eyes on his wooden crucifix, still preserved as a relic, and found in it consolation and support.

Two important matters occupied his mind in these last moments.

The first was not to leave the Sisters of Charity orphans, but to appoint a successor to Mlle. le Gras. For this purpose it would be necessary to assemble the sisters, but the doctors feared such a strain. On the 27th August, however, the saint had them

convoked, and addressed them in his usual simple style. He related how one day when Mlle. le Gras was ill, he asked her whom she thought the most suitable person to replace her. After some moments' reflection, she replied : "It seems to me that Sister Marguerite Chétif would be the best selection. Everywhere she has proved herself most prudent and successful. At Arras, where she is at present, she has worked wonders, and showed the greatest courage among the soldiers." Coinciding with this view, and in obedience to the last wishes of Mlle le Gras, Sister Marguerite Chétif was nominated Mother-General of the Sisters of Charity.

Now that this appointment was made, the saint began to think of making another, namely, that of his own successor as Superior-General of the Congregation of the Mission and of the Sisters of Charity. Perhaps he had originally intended this position for Father Portail, but death had taken him away. He next turned his attention to Father Almeras, notwithstanding that he was seriously ill at the house of the Oratorians in Tours. This distinguished priest the saint wished to succeed him in the government of his Congregation, and placing his nomination in a sealed box, confided it to Father Berthe, with instructions that it should not be opened till after his death. Although Saint Vincent did not intend to disclose this secret to Father Almeras, yet he was most anxious to see him. He wrote letter after letter, begging of him to hasten back. "The little Company," he wrote, "is greatly distressed at your absence, and it would console me more than anything to see you return." In the following letter of the saint, Father Almeras's nomination can be clearly seen, though not expressed :—"When shall we have the consolation of seeing you? Oh, how I desire it! I often ask God for it, not only for my own sake, which is by no means small on account of the affection and esteem I bear you, but more especially for the sake of the Congregation which is so edified by your example. I speak in this manner from a motive of gratitude towards God and you, sir, and that, all the more, because it will serve to show you how agreeable it is to God that you should preserve your health. Take every remedy in your power, and especially implore the assistance of God, who will not refuse you that strength of body and mind necessary for His designs upon you in our Company, if you ask it through the merits of our Lord, who has raised us up for His service. Spare nothing then which can contribute to your health and speedy return, for which we are all so anxious."

Although Father Almeras did not suspect the thoughts that filled the mind of Saint Vincent, yet the letters were too pressing not to make him summon up all his strength to set out at once. He went to Richelieu first, and from there to Paris, where he arrived on September 24, 1660, so spent and worn that he had to be conveyed immediately to the infirmary, without even being able to salute his beloved Father. The next morning, however, Saint Vincent had himself carried to the infirmary, and there these two old and cherished friends had a long and last interview. What passed between them we can never know. Probably the most important matters connected with the administration of the Congregation were discussed, but it became evident by his astonishment when the sealed box was afterwards opened, that not a word was said by the saint to allow Father Almeras to know of the appointment which awaited him.

Here was the last noble act of that grand character. We may say that God allowed the saint to perfect the works he had begun, and called him to Himself only when there was nothing left for him to do. After his interview with Father Almeras on September 25, the saint was carried back to his room, and towards midday such a deep sleep seized him that it was thought his last hour had arrived. The next day, however, being Sunday, he arose, went to Mass and Holy Communion, but so startling was his condition that the doctors thought every moment might be his last, and at half-past six Father d'Horgny administered extreme unction.

As usual, Father d'Horgny began with the interrogation. "Do you desire to receive the last sacraments?"—"Yes." "Do you believe all the Church teaches?"—"Yes." "Do you believe in one God in three Divine persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost?"—"Yes." Each question aroused our saint from his deep sleep, and he made an effort to reply; but only the first words of his answer were distinct, the rest was but an inarticulate murmur.

When he had finished these questions Father d'Horgny continued:—"Ask pardon of all?"—"With all my heart I do."—"Do you pardon us all?"—"Every one." And he evidently strove to add, "No one has offended me." Next Father d'Horgny repeated the acts of faith, hope, charity, and contrition, and then told the dying saint that they were about to say the *Confiteor*, and that all he might do was to strike his breast at the *mea culpa*; but this was not enough for him, and summoning up all his strength he repeated it in full.



The unctions were then begun, and after each the saint tried to say Amen. At the last unction he came to himself a little more, and opening his eyes, he cast a sweet smile on those around. They were desirous of profiting by this opportunity, and asked a blessing for all his children. "It is not for me . . . ." but here the saint fell off again into a doze, and could not add with his wonted humility, "wretch that I am, to give you a blessing." His head leaned forward on his breast, and the brothers in turn sustained him all that night.

About nine o'clock Fathers Bécu, Grimal, Bourdet, and the older members of the community came to bid him their last farewell. As each passed by his bedside he repeated a passage from Holy Scripture, and as at the voice of an angel, the dying hero of charity answered, "*Paratum* . . . ." Father d'Horgny and Father Berthe, seizing upon this new opportunity, again asked the saint to bless all his spiritual children, friends, and benefactors. Then the saint, lifting his eyes and meeting those of his prostrate children, said in a distinct voice, "May God bless you." The older fathers, now satisfied with this precious legacy, withdrew, leaving Father Berthe and the stronger ones to remain up all night. From time to time they repeated such pious ejaculations as "Mother of Grace, Mother of Mercy," and the saint replied, "Mother of Grace, Mother of Mercy" . . . or, again, "Mother of God, remember me." But most frequently of all they repeated the saint's favourite prayer, "Incline unto my aid, O God; O Lord, make haste to help me."

Towards eleven o'clock a sweat came over him, and his pulse became imperceptible. The sweat becoming cold, it was thought that his last hour had come, and Father D'Horgny at once called Fathers Bourdet, Bécu, and de Monchy, who began the prayers for a departing soul. One repeated the holy name of "Jesus," and the dying saint feebly echoed it. Another exclaimed, "O God, incline unto my aid," but the word "God" was all that he was able to say. Now, however, the cold sweat passed off, and his pulse again began to beat.

About a quarter past twelve Brother Nicholas said, "Sir?" and the saint sweetly replied, "Well, brother," but fell off again.

At half-past one they asked for another blessing for his spiritual children. "May God bless them," he replied, and gathering all the strength he had, he raised his hand and added, "*Qui cœpit opus, ipse perficiet.*" Then Father d'Horgny said, "Your blessing on the members of the Tuesday Conferences."—"Yes." "On the Sisters of Charity."—"Yes." "On the foundlings."—"Yes."

“On the Sisters of the Holy Name of Jesus.”—“Yes.” “On all benefactors and friends.”—“Yes.”

At two o'clock the cold sweat came on again, and one of the priests began the Creed, *Credo in Deum Patrem*. The saint replied, “*Credo*,” and kissed a crucifix which he held in his hands. “*Credo in Jesum Christum. Credo*,” he again repeated, as he again pressed the crucifix to his lips, and so on with all the other articles of faith. “*Spero*,” continued the priest; “*in te speravi, in Domino confido*.”—“*Confido*,” murmured the saint, and again he kissed the crucifix, the symbol of his faith, the pledge of his confident hope.

A little before four o'clock his countenance began to wear a glowing tint, as if on fire. They suggested holy ejaculations to him. He moved his lips, but could not close them, for this time death had come.

It was just at four o'clock in the morning, the hour at which for forty years he rose to pray, that this saintly soul began its agony, and after a quarter of an hour, without convulsion or struggle, went before its God. It was Monday, September 27, that Saint Vincent, seated in an arm-chair, thus peacefully passed away in his eighty-fifth year. His body remained as flexible as in life, and his countenance wore a serene and venerable aspect that struck all who beheld it. Even in this world God glorifies His saints.

His organs were found to be quite sound, and his heart was preserved in a beautiful silver case presented by the Duchess d'Aiguillon. The remains were placed on a catafalque, and six ecclesiastics continued day and night to recite the office of the dead. A large concourse of people came to pay their homage to the dead saint, and among them were princes, bishops, religious, and the distinguished ladies of Paris. The Priests of the Mission and the Sisters of Charity were constantly weeping round the tomb of their father, and the poor of the city strove with each other to kiss the hands or feet of him who had spent his life for them.

The funeral was attended by an immense number. First came the Priests of the Mission, led by the saint's successor, Father Almeras; next the Sisters of Charity, headed by their new Mother-General, Margaret Chétif. They were followed by the princes, including the Prince of Conti, the King's cousin, the Papal Nuncio, the bishops, the Presidents of the Assemblies, the magistrates, and all the distinguished ladies of the capital. In this sad cortège might be seen the most eminent of the French

clergy walking together as members of the Tuesday Conferences, and among them Bossuet, who could not restrain his tears. Last, but first to the heart of St. Vincent de Paul, came in their thousands the poor of Paris, those chosen ones who might aptly be called the saint's chief mourners.

The remains, enclosed in a double coffin, were deposited in the choir of the Church of Saint-Lazare, and the following inscription placed over the tomb : "*Hic jacet venerabilis vir Vincentius a Paulo, presbyter, fundator, seu institutor, et primus superior generalis congregationis Missionis, nec non Puellarum Charitatis. Obiit die 27 Septembris anni 1660, ætatis vero suæ 85. Præfuit annis 35.*"

Two months afterwards the members of the Tuesday Conferences, with Bossuet at their head, held a special meeting at Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois. What a beautiful testimony Bossuet would have placed on record had he spoken ; but being then only Archdeacon of Metz, the Bishop of Puy, who was intimately acquainted with our saint, was given precedence. He spoke for two hours on the profound humility and incomparable charity of Saint Vincent de Paul. Of this funeral oration we shall not speak, except to admire Bossuet's humility in the eulogium he passed upon it.

Those who were unable to be present at the obsequies of our saint sent letters of apology, which bore testimony to the widespread admiration in which he was held. From the terms in which Louis XIV., Anne of Austria, the Queen of Poland, the Prince of Conti, Père de Gondi, Bossuet, the archbishops, bishops and the most distinguished religious of both sexes spoke of the deceased saint, it was evident that the time should soon arrive when his remains would be raised upon the altars of the Church.

## CHAPTER II.

### SAINT VINCENT'S NATURAL QUALITIES.

HAVING reached the close of this extraordinary life, one of the most fruitful in good works that has ever existed, it remains for us to contemplate once for all the characteristics of a man at the same time so great, so simple, so modest, so humble, and who, notwithstanding his humility, or rather in consequence of it, has left his mark on the period in which he lived. Let us begin with his exterior, and gather from it our first impressions of his mind.

In looking at the true likeness of Saint Vincent de Paul, what strikes us at once is his resolute aspect. His eyes, deeply set, shone with a singular brightness which seemed to penetrate to one's very soul, while at the same time they clearly revealed a kindly disposition. His forehead was large and clear, denoting an abiding serenity. His nose was not striking; but his mouth, a sure index of character, was finely shaped. His whole person had an air of gravity and authority, which might have erred on the side of excess, had he not laboured to acquire that suavity which made his manner so attractive. While still young, he prayed ardently to be relieved of a morose disposition which might estrange people from him. His prayer was heard, and the kindness, humility and charity that shone in his countenance have made him one of the most sympathetic figures that ever existed in the Church.

Portraits of the saint have been spread without number, but often his true likeness is not reproduced. The resoluteness of his character is not sufficiently emphasised, while its tender side, no doubt extreme, is unduly exaggerated. Fortunately two excellent portraits remain, painted by two great masters, which will ever preserve the true characteristics of our saint.

The first is by Philippe de Champaigne. We have carefully examined it, and can flatter ourselves that we have seen Saint Vincent almost as really as Mlle. le Gras or Father Portail. Where, when and how this portrait was taken we have been unable to discover.

More details remain of the portrait made by Simon-François, and so often copied, especially by the two great artists, Van Schuppen and Edelinck. Twenty times was Saint Vincent asked to have his portrait taken, but even the Duchess d'Aiguillon, Mme. Goussault, or Mme. Lamoignon had no greater success in

persuading him than Mlle. le Grass or Father Portail. "A poor wretch like me, a miserable sinner," the saint would say, "to have his portrait taken ! Oh no ;" and he said this in such a tone that no hope was left of persuading him. Then they adopted the same tactics as the celebrated painter Rigault so successfully used with De Rancé, the great reformer of La Trappe. Simon-François was brought to Saint-Lazare, like so many other pious laymen, to make a retreat. Ostensibly for this purpose he remained several days, assisting at the saint's mass, hearing his instructions, and sitting opposite to him in the refectory. After each exercise the painter retired to his room and took down the impressions which struck him. The saint had no idea of what was being done, and thus was finished that excellent likeness of which so many copies are to be found. It serves to correct these numerous portraits which threatened to misrepresent the true physiognomy of our saint.

But this painting is not enough to preserve the true likeness of Saint Vincent. We must closely examine his mind, his heart, his character—in a word, his very soul ; for here, again, there are many erroneous conceptions to remove. We shall boldly assert at once, what may surprise many, that his intellectual gifts came very near to genius. This, however, is our deliberate opinion, based on the very best grounds. To what heights he might have reached, had he applied his mind to purely philosophical or theological questions, we shall not presume to say. For pure theory he had no taste, and it is doubtful whether his imagination was very powerful. But in practical questions he had no equal. His penetration was extreme. Nothing escaped him. When a new scheme was proposed to him, he saw at a glance its advantages and disadvantages, its helps and its hindrances. If he, after examining the matter from all sides, decided to undertake the work, no one might fear that something unforeseen would prevent its execution. As a matter of fact, he never abandoned what he once undertook. Never was he forced to withdraw and say, I was mistaken. His humility would have at once made him say so, but no opportunity ever occurred, so great was his foresight and the depth of his penetration.

To this keen penetration Saint Vincent joined an exceptional courage, the product of his great mind. People thought him timid ; nobody was more courageous. So it was when he faced discouragement from Rome, the bishops and others, beginning what they considered novelties, but what time showed to be measures both adequate and opportune. What courage did he

not show in the institution of the Sisters of Charity, drawing them from the cloister, and sending them without any other veil than their modesty to labour among soldiers and the sick ! Where Saint Francis de Sales had drawn back, he stood firm and triumphed. What courage again to break with past traditions, to withstand the opposition of Rome, and establish the Congregation of the Mission, not as a religious order, but as a new form of life consecrated to God and adapted to the needs of modern society—a Congregation that has been the model to all founders for the last three hundred years ! What courage in the work of the foundlings ! When the Duchess d'Aiguillon, Mme. Goussault and Mme. Lamoignon said it was folly to continue it any longer, Saint Vincent, relying on his spirit of faith and charity, resolved that the work, despite all difficulties, should not be abandoned, and here again he succeeded. What courage to send his missionaries to Algiers, Tunis and Tripoli, and invest them with consular power ! Oh, why had not Louis XIV., Mazarin, or Anne of Austria even an ounce of Saint Vincent's courage ! and far different would have been the results for the Church and for France. But above all, what courage was manifested by this poor priest, who, when France, Spain and Italy remained indifferent, thought of raising a fleet to sail against the Turks, and had not death intervened, perhaps two centuries before Charles X. the French flag should have been floating on the ramparts of Algiers.

Courage is admirable, but only on condition that it is directed, governed and restrained by common-sense. Picture courage without common-sense, and what peril ! On the other hand, common-sense without decision and courage, and what weakness ! But unite those three qualities, the solid foundation of common-sense with the swift wings of decision and courage, and of what will not such a character be capable ? Now, Saint Vincent's common-sense was not less than his decision and courage, nay, perhaps it was greater. He had that rare good sense which Bossuet calls the mastery of life, for, when possessed to a certain degree, it confers on its owner a kind of infallibility.

To these excellent qualities, with which great works are begun, he added another, without which they cannot be completed. He had a genius for organisation. This showed itself from the very beginning. When at the instance of his moving appeal, the rich of Châtillon-les-Dombes came *en masse* to help a starving family, Saint Vincent exclaimed : " Behold noble but ill-regulated

charity ! These poor people shall have more than enough to-day, but to-morrow they shall be as bad as ever. Let us organise." Then without any delay he formed an association, gave it rules, and he did the same every place he went. He did not, however, originate all his works, for many of them were suggested by friends, or sprang naturally from the current he had created. But it was he alone who gave them their lasting form. At Trévoux, Mâcon and Paris, he not only instituted associations for men and women, priests and religious ; he not only established shelters for the foundling, homes for the aged, and hospitals for the sick ; but he gave to each a code of rules so complete that they never required alteration, and so adapted to attain their end that they have become the model of all modern charitable institutions. His schemes for the support of the different associations of charity, even in country districts, his institution of soup-kitchens, his manufactories for boys and his successful overthrow of mendicity are not only bold and courageous conceptions, but masterpieces of statesmanship which go far to prove that he possessed the power of government in the highest degree.

All these grand qualities are evident in the saint's writings. He wrote little except letters, which, however, were very numerous. In 1664, only four years after his death, 30,000 letters were extant, but a century afterwards Collet could not find more than 7,000, while at present there are only 2,500. In these letters we must not seek the graceful style of Saint Francis de Sales, nor the oratory that pervades the letters of Bossuet, nor the subtle finesse of Fénelon. But gravity, common-sense, firmness, a deep knowledge of men and things, and an eminently practical mind are manifest on every page. They are letters in the art of governing, of a statesman capable of guiding an empire. The style, it is true, is somewhat involved and embarrassed, whether from want of imagination or from deliberate design. The frequent corrections which are to be found were not exceptional at that period, as may be seen from the letters of Bossuet and his contemporaries. But that heavy style which is found in the saint's letters disappeared when he spoke. To write well is one thing, to speak well is another. Writing requires art, and Saint Vincent did not seek it. Speaking wants but a head and a heart, and he was exceptionally gifted in both. His heart carried him away, and tore from him those noble sentiments and eloquent appeals, which show that he possessed the eloquence of character, which is the highest of all.

After dwelling on his mental capacity we shall not delay to

speak of his great heart, for on that point there is only one voice. What characterised it was not sensibility, too often impressionable and transient, nor tenderness, too frequently partial and uncertain. No, it was none of these ; it was higher, wider, stronger and more God-like : it was kindness. Bossuet was thinking perhaps of his old master when he wrote these eloquent words : " When God made man's heart, the noblest sentiment He placed in it was kindness." This is especially true of Saint Vincent de Paul. In every human soul there is a ray of kindness, otherwise it would not resemble the Creator. But in Saint Vincent this gift was boundless, and gave him a spirit of beneficence which left him no equal. That Saint Francis de Sales had this noble quality Saint Vincent himself attests when he said, " Oh ! how kind God must be when the Bishop of Geneva is so much so." But the kindness of Saint Francis was in compassionating the unfortunate, that of Saint Vincent in relieving them. All the saints had this gift ; but in some it was concentrated on the poor ; in others on the sick, on the aged, or the infirm. But the kindness of Saint Vincent was not confined to one class, it was universal, healing every wound and relieving every sorrow. For every species of suffering he found a solace, and he devised remedies adequately adapted to remove every want. His great heart, burning with charity, was ever finding new resources to stem the torrent of human misery, and he has left behind him works so numerous, so varied and so perfect, that by his charity he stands pre-eminent, even among the saints. Well might Mme. Lamoignon say of him that he had done more than twenty saints put together.

In following the history of Saint Vincent de Paul we may notice that his wonderful activity in doing good did not manifest itself at once. This man, who was to do so much, never hurried. At fifty he had not yet begun. He appeared before that period not to have contemplated doing anything by way of preparation for his great works. Far from that, he even sought a benefice, and thought of leaving Paris to live in a little village of the Béarn, near his aged mother. He accepted a tutorship, a position usually mediocre and without prospect, but he abandoned it for the care of 3000 souls in Châtillon-les-Dombes. When at length Providence had guided him to the true field of his labours, he, who was essentially a man of action, at first manifested no taste for it. He never sought it, nay, he fled from it, and refused it as long as he prudently could. Whether it was that his powerful mind saw difficulties and obstacles, or his humility persuaded him that he was not worthy, or his fear of forestalling, as he used



to say, the moment of Providence, the fact is, however, that we might almost say he was wanting in taking the initiative. His principal works were suggested by others or evoked by circumstances. The ladies of Châtillon-les-Dombes suggested the idea of the Ladies' Association of Charity ; Mme. de Gondi the idea of the Congregation of the Mission ; Mme. Goussault the Hôtel-Dieu. He always urged time and patience, nay, he frequently multiplied objections, but this was with a view to purify and strengthen the undertaking. Sometimes the authority of the Archbishop of Paris had to be brought to bear on him. But once he undertook a work he sealed it with a stamp of perfection.

It has been said that as Saint Thomas compiled the Summa of Faith, so Saint Vincent compiled the Summa of Charity. This distinction, however, must be made, that Saint Vincent did not set out with the intention of renewing the ancient traditions and works of charity, in order to harmonise them with the modern, and unite both in a majestic whole. No ; according as he met suffering and vice, he at once sought a remedy, and if in the end the result of his labours was a vast and magnificent combination of works to relieve every kind of want and misery, a veritable Summa of Charity, he did not claim the credit of its design.

Finally, to complete the sketch of his character, we must add that having once undertaken a work he never abandoned it. Nothing was capable of diverting him, neither difficulties in the execution, the opposition of persons, nor that weariness which supervenes on protracted efforts. He began quietly, patiently and opportunely, and then followed out his plan with rare constancy and invincible courage.

Behold what we may call the natural qualities of Saint Vincent de Paul ; for from his very infancy they were so absorbed in grace that it is difficult to contemplate them apart from it. Sometimes it was charity that inflamed his noble heart and evoked those extraordinary acts of kindness. Sometimes it was faith that illumined his powerful mind and inspired him with those sublime conceptions. It was the same with all his faculties. Each of them was beautifully prepared by God to be, as it were, the setting for a corresponding divine virtue, so that none of them can be viewed except in the light of grace. As no action of Jesus Christ was purely human, but by virtue of the hypostatic union each was at once human and divine, so in a certain sense we cannot dissociate the natural and supernatural qualities of Saint Vincent de Paul. Let us then ascend higher, and having contemplated the great man, let us now contemplate the great saint.

## CHAPTER III.

### SAINT VINCENT'S SUPERNATURAL QUALITIES.

IT was not his genius but his sanctity that made Saint Vincent de Paul what he was. Without sanctity, though wonderfully endowed, he never could have accomplished the works which have made his name so renowned. His great mind would not have been sufficiently exalted, nor his tender heart sufficiently deep, nor even his grand character strong enough to overcome the obstacles which he met. Instead, perhaps, of crowning his career amid the glory of so many works so perfectly conceived and so admirably realised, we should witness him, like so many other philanthropists, die sad and discouraged, having yearned to do so much, yet having done so little.

Besides, Saint Vincent did not rely on his natural qualities to found his great works ; on the contrary, he ignored and despised them. He used to call himself a wretch, a sinner, one fit for nothing. He spoke in these terms, which from other lips might provoke a laugh, but from his commanded attention and respect. It is generally believed that the great virtue of Saint Vincent de Paul was his charity, but we presume to say it was his humility, which seems to have been the very depth of his soul, and to have shone forth spontaneously on every occasion. While praising one of his missionaries he adds of himself : "I alone am a miserable sinner, doing nothing but evil." On another occasion he wrote : "I can assure you, as I most certainly do before God, that no human motive would induce me to say this, but solely for the glory of God and His Church, because I am only a poor labourer and wretched sinner, nay, the most wretched in the whole world. I beg of you then to pay attention to what I say, if it seems conformable to the will of God." Once when relating the cruel martyrdom of an aged priest in England, he concluded by saying : "I tell you this by way of contrast to the attachment I have for my miserable carcass." Writing to a nun, he asks her prayers for "the most miserable and greatest sinner in the world." A distinguished prelate, seeing the extraordinary humility of our saint, could not help remarking that he was a perfect Christian. "O my lord," replied the saint, "a perfect Christian ! People ought

rather to regard me as a demon and the greatest sinner in the world."

Some one who had lately joined his Congregation speaking one day at a conference, expressed his great regret for profiting so little from the saint's wonderful example. Saint Vincent did not interrupt him, but, after the conference, gave him the following admonition in public: "Sir, we have the practice amongst us of never praising a person in his presence. It is true, sir, I am a wonder, but a wonder of wickedness, worse than the very demons. I am not exaggerating, but saying what I sincerely feel."

A priest of the Congregation wrote to Saint Vincent complaining that the Superior whom he had appointed was not sufficiently refined for the locality. The saint replied by a letter, in which he said many things in favour of the Superior, and concluded with these words: "And as to myself, what am I? How have I been tolerated so long, I who am so rude and dull among the distinguished persons with whom I am brought into contact? I must seem to have no mind nor judgment, and, what is worse, to have nothing like the virtue of the Superior of whom you complain."

It was his custom, amid the honours and marks of respect shown to him at court and in the houses of the nobility, to recall his humble origin, saying that he was only the son of a peasant, and that in youth he had guarded his father's flocks. When we think of the aristocratic seventeenth century, a period when the peasantry were treated like beasts, as Labruyère says, we appreciate all the more the saint's humility.

A relative of one of the priests of his Congregation manifested, through respect, some hesitation to sit beside Saint Vincent. The saint, seeing this, quietly turned round and said: "Why, sir, have you any difficulty? I am only the son of a poor peasant."

"After paying a visit to a man of rank, the latter was about to conduct the saint downstairs, when he suddenly turned round and, among other things, said this to the gentleman: 'Do you not know, sir, that I am only the son of a poor peasant, and in my youth guarded flocks?' His host, who was a sensible man, replied that the great King David had done likewise. Saint Vincent became quite confused at so apt a retort to his humility."

It was the saint's delight to say that he had made but little studies, and always spoke of himself as a scholar of the fourth form. He never failed to dwell on this point when consulted by bishops. "Sir," said he to a vicar-general, "is it possible that you ask advice from the son of a poor labourer, one who has

tended cattle, and who is still in ignorance and vice? I shall obey like the ass of old, through obedience, but only on condition that you pay no regard to my opinion except it coincides with your own and that of others."

But that for which he humbled himself most was what he called the enormity of his sins. When undertaking any important work, he often went on his knees, in presence of his priests, and declared the greatest sins of his past life. They were greatly edified by such conduct, and admired the supernatural courage of their Superior in conquering that inclination to conceal one's faults which is natural to all men. Every year, on the anniversary of his baptism, he went on his knees before the community, asking pardon of God and of his confrères for all the faults he had committed. It was, however, not merely on that occasion, but on many others, that he humbled himself at the feet of the very least of his brethren.

"Thinking that he had reprimanded a lay-brother too harshly, he did not wish to celebrate mass till he had apologised. On going to the kitchen he could not find the brother, but he continued his search till he found him, and then most humbly apologised."

On one occasion he was travelling with three of his priests, and, to pass the time, he related something which had happened to himself years before. The priests were listening with the utmost attention, when suddenly the saint stopped and asked their pardon for such pride and vanity in speaking so much of himself. He then changed the conversation, and at the end of the journey again asked their pardon on his knees.

A very distinguished prelate having written to ask his advice on some important matters, this is how the saint began his reply: "Alas! my lord, what are you doing, communicating such important business to a poor, ignorant person like me, the most wretched creature before God and man, on account of my past and present sins? I am totally unworthy of the honour your humility confers upon me; nor should I attempt to speak, were it not that your lordship commands me."

But while he was thus humbling himself, his works eloquently sounded his praise. According as he advanced in years they became more fruitful, and yet he protested that he was nothing.

He declared that he was neither the originator nor the founder of these works, but rather an obstacle to them. Of Father Breton, one of his priests who had died, he wrote: "In losing Father Breton we lose a great deal, according to the world, but it seems to me that he will do more for us in heaven than he could have

done on earth, and if it is the will of God that we should have an establishment in Rome, he will obtain it by his prayers, unless my sins prevent it."

The less Saint Vincent de Paul relied on himself, the more he relied upon God. He never would think of undertaking any work which he did not clearly see God had demanded of him. Even when this seemed evident he still waited, in the hope that some one more worthy than he might undertake the work. But when, after long prayer and mature deliberation, he felt that God required a certain work from him, then nothing could impede or trouble him. "It is the will of God," he would say, "and we have nothing to fear, except our own sins." When an important question was submitted to the Pope for decision, a matter that was to decide the fate of Saint-Lazare, the saint merely said, "I have nothing to fear but my own sins." Difficulties and objections only served to bring out into bolder relief his confidence in God. Sometimes it was money that was wanted, without which the houses would have to be closed ; sometimes it was pestilence that carried off the most distinguished members of his Congregation ; another time it was the opposition of some lord or high person to the most evident and suitable scheme ; yet under any or all of these trials the saint's constant expression was : "God alone, God alone ; He will not abandon a work which was commenced in His name. It is not our work, it is His, and He will protect it." This holy peace and confidence in God were visible in his countenance and cheered his companions. He loved to refer to Abraham, the perfect model of confidence in God. "Remember this great patriarch," he used to say to his confrères, "to whom God had promised to people the earth through his son, and yet He ordered him to be sacrificed. Anybody might have said : If Abraham sacrifices his son, how can God fulfil His promise ? Nevertheless, this holy man, accustomed to obey the will of God, promptly prepared for the sacrifice. It is for God to see to that ; I shall fulfil His command, and He will accomplish His promise ; how, I know not, but He is the All-Powerful. I shall offer Him the dearest thing I have in this world, since He wishes it. But it is my only son ! — no matter. Again, in sacrificing him, shall I not deprive God of the means of keeping His word ? God desires it ; it must be done. But if I preserve him my race will be blessed ; God has said so. Yes, but He has also said he must die. I shall obey, whatever happens, and hope in the promises of God. Admire, my confrères, this confidence in God. The patriarch has no fear, but is ready to sacrifice the dearest thing he

possesses, and is confident that all will be well, for he relies on the word of God. Why, gentlemen, cannot we act in the same manner : leave all to God, and do as He commands ? ”

The better to show forth how much his labours were the work of God, he made no account of human means, so often sought after by other men. He not only disregarded them, but even despised them.

If persons offered to enter the Congregation, the saint's great fear was lest they might be too talented, and might not be able to efface themselves and live unknown. When offers of money, houses, or annuities were made, he seemed to make no account of them. What persuasion was necessary to induce him to accept Saint-Lazare ! How many benefices he refused, and with what readiness he ceded anything that was disputed ! He abhorred publicity as a means of success, and had confidence only in works founded amid silence, contempt and humiliation. Even the reputation of his Congregation and of the Sisters of Charity had to suffer in this way. One day a priest asked to be admitted into the Congregation, saying that he thought it was the best way to heaven. Saint Vincent replied : “ It is your goodness, sir, that makes you say so, but the truth is, other Congregations are more holy ; ours is the last of all.” To another applicant his answer was : “ What, sir ! do you wish to become a missionary ? We are only poor labourers.”

When we seek amid such humility, such forgetfulness of self and such total abandonment to the holy will of God, what was the source, the foundation of virtue so heroic, we find it in his faith, at once so simple, so exalted and so invincible, that it never wavered. He had imbibed that faith with his mother's milk, but with what care had he cultivated it and with what courage he guarded it ! Born towards the close of a century agitated by heresy, he grew up amid the most pernicious teachings, and from a motive of charity became the friend of false leaders, yet his faith was never tarnished for an instant. Under their most insinuating influence he quietly pressed his hand over his heart and repeated his *Credo*. “ As trees beaten by the wind and storm strike deeper root and gain strength from the tempest, so it would seem that God wished to perfect the faith of His servant by exposing him to trials and temptations, from which he emerged strengthened rather than enfeebled. The saint was often heard to say, that he thanked God for having preserved his faith in an age that had produced so many errors, and for having always given him grace to adhere to the teaching of the Church.”

By degrees this spirit of faith governed all the powers of his soul, and lent a striking elevation to all his works. In every age there are to be found men of intellect and of heart, who are moved with pity at the sight of the misery among the poor. Their hunger and their rags appeal to them. But what is the highest ambition of such men? To open nurseries for children, asylums for the aged, or hospitals for the sick, and then they think all is done. But Saint Vincent de Paul founded more asylums and hospitals than they, and yet he felt he had done nothing.

On the other hand, some men, less occupied with the body than with the mind, have striven to raise the people from the darkness and ignorance in which they found them. But Saint Vincent excelled here also. He covered France with schools for the poor, and taught the daughters of the rich and noble to abandon home and pleasure to consecrate themselves to the education of their less fortunate brethren. But even all this was not enough for him, though it was the maximum for the so-called philanthropists. There was one step more, one higher aim, namely, to care, to teach, to guard the immortal soul, and bring it safely back to Him from whom it came. To feed the body was good, to enlighten the mind was better, but above and before everything else in the eyes of Saint Vincent de Paul was to purify, to guard, to save the soul.

Even from this height he looked higher still, and saw clothed in the rags of the poor the person of his Lord and Master Jesus Christ. He used to say: "I must not judge poor peasants according to their exterior or according as they speak, for often they are far from what they seem. Let us judge them by the light of faith, and we shall see in them the Son of God who wished to be poor, who in His passion lost almost the appearance of a man, who appeared a fool to the Gentiles and a stumbling-block to the Jews." After all this, Saint Vincent regarded himself as the evangelist of the poor: *Evangelizare pauperibus misit me*. "O God! how beautiful are the poor when we see them in the light of faith; while if we judge them according to this world, they seem, no doubt, despicable."

Such sentiments are far above those of mere philosophy and philanthropy. In truth, Saint Vincent lived in a higher sphere. His great mind was illumined by faith, and his great heart inflamed by charity. But even charity was not high enough. It was for him not an end, but a means. He gave to the poor to bring them to God; he cared the body to heal the soul. What

touched his heart most deeply was not the sight of poverty and misery, but the sight of a world sullied by sin ; of souls made to the image and likeness of God, yet losing all consciousness of the end of their creation. He was an apostle by his charity, serving God in serving souls, not out of philanthropy alone, but from a spirit of sanctity. To this exalted faith Saint Vincent added a tender love of God and of His Son Jesus Christ. It is here he rises above the mere philanthropist, for though he loved the poor, he loved still more Jesus Christ, their Lord and his. The thought of all our Saviour did for man by His incarnation and death transported him, and his joy was visible in his countenance, notwithstanding his efforts to conceal it. Often his eyes remained fixed for a long time on the crucifix, as if he were in an ecstasy. He grieved that he could not return love for love, and even when eighty-five years of age sighed to go and die a martyr for Jesus Christ in India. He often expressed a wish to go on the foreign mission, though he should die on the way. As it was, this man of eighty years might still be seen preaching, catechising and hearing confessions.

But it was in the celebration of the holy sacrifice of the mass that the liveliness of his faith and the depth of his love became most evident. If he met in the Gospel some words of our Saviour, he pronounced them in such a tender and affectionate tone as to move those that heard him. On more than one occasion persons who did not know him, on hearing his mass, exclaimed, "How devoutly that priest says mass ; assuredly he must be a saint !" Others said he seemed like an angel at the altar.

His modesty was such that one would think that he saw Jesus Christ with the eyes of his body, and his whole comportment was so holy that it was capable of awakening the most dormant faith, and of inspiring the most tender devotion towards this august sacrament of the altar.

When in presence of the Blessed Sacrament he always knelt, and manifested the deepest humility. Jesus Christ was his book and his mirror, in which he viewed all things. When in doubt he had recourse to his Divine model, considering what He had said or done under similar circumstances, and that Saint Vincent faithfully imitated, heedless of his own judgment, of human respect and of the misconstruction his conduct might incur. "For," he used to say, "human prudence is often deceived and wanders from the right path ; but the words of eternal wisdom are infallible, and its ways straight and secure."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Abelly.



The love which Saint Vincent bore our Lord was never absent from him, but always animated his thoughts, words and actions. He constantly introduced into his conversation some word or maxim of the Son of God, so filled was he with His Spirit, and so faithful in following His example.

The love of Jesus Christ, the imitation of that Divine model, the union with Him who is the way, the truth, and the life, were the source of the saint's great sanctity and the only explanation of his great works. He might say with Saint Paul, "I live, now not I ; but Christ liveth in me" ;<sup>1</sup> and hence it was Jesus Christ imparted to him the riches of His charity.

<sup>1</sup> Gal. ii, 20.

## CHAPTER IV.

### CANONISATION OF SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL.

THIRTY-SEVEN years had elapsed since the children of Saint Vincent de Paul had deposited the mortal remains of their Father in the Church of Saint-Lazare, and yet no steps had been taken to place them on the altars of the Church. Neither Father Almeras nor Father Joly had done anything to obtain that honour which they knew he so well deserved ; on the contrary, they manifested a prudent reserve.

In this they were worthy of all praise. An event, however, occurred which forced them from this line of action, and led to the first step towards the saint's canonisation. The humble priest, who had not worked miracles during life, was now beginning to do so after death. Around his tomb each day were thronging the sick, especially the sick poor of Paris, and each day brought new evidence of the saint's power in heaven. One of these miraculous cures caused more than usual commotion, for the recipient of the favour was Father Bonnet, a Priest of the Mission, and afterwards its Superior-General. It was now decided to approach Cardinal de Noailles, Archbishop of Paris, who was necessarily to be the first judge in such a case. A tribunal was at once formed, composed of the most eminent theologians in Paris, and they were appointed for the purpose of investigating the life, virtues and alleged miracles of the servant of God. For nine consecutive months, and in more than sixty sittings, two hundred witnesses were examined, all of whom had known the deceased. The beauty of their evidence made it all the more regrettable that the process had not been begun twenty years before, while so many other disciples and admirers of the saint were living.

While this tribunal was sitting in Paris, some distinguished ecclesiastics were sent through the provinces to examine persons who, because of their age or infirmity, could not come to Paris. In this way such abundant testimony to the exalted virtue of our saint was collected, that the cause of Saint Vincent's beatification is one of the grandest and richest on record. A full and authentic copy of the report was drawn up and sent to Rome, where it was again examined. It declared that no cultus had been offered, and

thus there was no anticipation of the judgment of the Holy See. The Cardinal Archbishop came to inspect the tomb and whatever had belonged to our saint. He found everything revealing the respect in which he was held, but nothing to mark the honour that is paid to a canonised saint. The summary of this investigation was also sent to Rome, where it was examined by the learned Lambertini, afterwards Benedict XIV., who, finding no obstacle, recommended the introduction of the cause of beatification.

Meanwhile the sovereign pontiff was receiving supplications not only from France, but we may say from all Europe. Louis XIV., in a beautiful letter, added to his own testimony that of his father, Louis XIII., and of his mother, Anne of Austria. Among others who wrote were Leopold, Duke of Lorraine, the Duke of Tuscany, the Doge of Genoa, the King and Queen of Poland, and an immense number of French, Irish, Polish, Italian and Spanish prelates. The Pope was astonished, and exclaimed one day as he was presented with a large packet of letters, "Oh, how marvellous, such a quantity of petitions !"

The French clergy wished to follow the example of their bishops, and prepared a solemn supplication to the sovereign pontiff, signed by the Archbishop of Paris. The citizens of the capital likewise wished to swell the chorus of admiration, and having drawn up a document containing their testimony to the holiness of the deceased, entrusted it to a deputation, which was sent to present it to the Pope.

Thus Paris, France, nay, Europe, turned towards the successor of Saint Peter, the infallible teacher of faith and morals, and with one voice exclaimed : "O Father, we have seen amongst us a man whose piety, charity, humility and marvellous good works have evoked our greatest admiration. Tell us—are we deceived ; does not such a life deserve the honours of canonisation ?"

Clement XI. received this petition with joy, and gave immediate orders that the ordinary process was to be begun, and witnesses to be procured and examined who were able to give evidence. Lambertini, the future Benedict XIV., assumed the rôle of devil's advocate, and displayed all his great learning and penetration in discharging the duties of that office. No objection, however, could lessen the reputation for sanctity of the servant of God ; it was proof against every assailant.

After the process *in genere*, the process *ne pereant probationes*, which was to at once secure the testimony of aged or infirm witnesses, and finally the process *in specie*, in which more than fifty were examined, had been concluded, the next step, according

to apostolic procedure, was to visit the tomb. The Cardinal-Archbishop of Paris came to Saint-Lazare, accompanied by the Bishops of Saintes and Tulle, two sub-promotors of the faith, a medical doctor, a surgeon, and a number of the Priests of the Mission, including Father Bonnet, the Superior-General. A few brothers opened the tomb, and while they were doing so every heart beat with emotion, each one waiting to see in what condition the body should be found. Fifty years had passed since the burial, and yet the sacred remains were found quite intact. "When they opened the tomb," writes an eye-witness, "everything was the same as when deposited. The eyes and nose alone showed some decay. I counted eighteen teeth. The body was not moved, but those who approached saw at once that it was entire, and that the soutane was not in the least damaged by time. No offensive odour was discernible, and the doctors testified that the body could not be thus preserved for so long a time by any natural means." Of all who witnessed this ceremony, Father Bonnet, who had been cured at the tomb, was the person most moved and manifested most joy.

It now only remained to examine the writings of our saint, the rules which he gave to his Congregation and to the Sisters of Charity, his letters and the regulations for the different works he founded. This examination lasted many years, and when at length the zeal and talent of Lambertini could find no flaw, the solemn question was put: "Does it appear that the servant of God, Vincent de Paul, has practised all virtues, theological as well as cardinal, in an heroic degree?" The Congregation after five hours' deliberation unanimously replied in the affirmative.

Six days afterwards, September 22, 1727, Clement XI. ordered the decree to be made public, and thus Vincent de Paul was declared Venerable, after a process of inquiry which had lasted twenty-two years.

To be declared Venerable is only the beginning of the process of canonisation. To have practised virtue in an heroic degree is a great deal, and from it we may with certainty conclude that the servant of God is enjoying eternal glory, but something more is required before he can be raised upon the altars of the Church and receive public honour. It was necessary that miracles should be proved to have taken place after his death, which would show that he was of the chosen few whom God wishes the faithful to honour even on earth. These miracles were not wanting in the case of Saint Vincent, for sixty four were ready at hand; but to avoid prolonged discussion, at first eight were chosen, and after-

wards they were reduced to four, which were submitted for examination to the best theologians and medical doctors in Rome. This examination lasted over two years, after which the Pope being satisfied that no possible objection could any longer be brought against the miracles, declared Vincent de Paul Blessed, on July 14, 1729.

On August 21, five weeks afterwards, Rome was *en fête*; the vast basilica of Saint Peter's was thronged to witness the inauguration of the name of Vincent de Paul among the Blessed. A large painting of the servant of God, supported by four doctors of the Church, was placed near the chair of Saint Peter. Cardinals, princes, bishops and many distinguished personages, came to be present at the solemn function. After High Mass the Archbishop intoned the *Te Deum*, and the mighty basilica echoed the blasts of the silver trumpets as the people repeated the invocation, "*Beate Vincenti, ora pro nobis.*"

The same evening, escorted by the Sacred College and a brilliant court, the Pope went in procession to Saint Peter's. Here he was met by the children of St. Vincent, and together with them knelt in prayer before the image of their Father.

The following year similar rejoicings were held in Paris. The celebration took place in Saint-Lazare, and was continued for three days. The Archbishop presided, and there too were the Priests of the Mission, the Sisters of Charity, the Ladies of the Assembly, poor from the hospital, and the foundlings, all united round the tomb to pay Blessed Vincent honour.

Our saint was not slow in showing his gratitude for all these honours, and the number of favours and miracles became so great, that the Archbishop appointed a commission composed of bishops, which examined in two years no less than one hundred and thirty-five witnesses. After further investigation of the evidence of sanctity deduced from these repeated miracles, Clement XII. determined to add Blessed Vincent de Paul to the catalogue of saints. The Bull is dated June 16, 1737, and we give it in its entirety, for there is not a more beautiful panegyric of the saint, nor a more authentic *résumé* of his life and works.

#### BULL OF CANONISATION.

"CLEMENT, Bishop, Servant of the servants of God.

"For a perpetual remembrance.

"The heavenly Jerusalem, that city of the living God, wherein the Sovereign Father rewards all those who have laboured in

His vineyard with the same recompense of everlasting life, possesses, nevertheless, different courts and palaces in which each one will have his place according to his deserts. This is why, to comfort the Apostles when saddened at the thought of Christ's approaching death, fearful at the sight of their own weakness, and anxious about their future reward, hearing it said that Peter, the most ardent and courageous of them all, he who had been established their prince and leader, would thrice deny his Master before cock-crow, our Saviour consoled them, saying, 'In My Father's house there are many mansions.' By this He gave them to understand that none of them, in spite of their different strength and weakness, their greater or less sanctity, would be excluded from that happy kingdom, wherein there are many mansions, that is to say, different degrees of merit in the one eternal life. In truth, the sun, moon and stars have each their own splendour, and star differeth from star in glory. Again, the Gospel speaks of seeds of varying fruitfulness; for one seed produces a hundred-fold, another sixty, and another thirty: thus the martyrs bear fruit a hundred-fold, virgins sixty-fold, and the other saints each in their own degree.

"There are then different mansions in the kingdom of God; the stars have not the same glory; the produce of the seed is not the same, but is manifold. There is one crown for the time of persecution. Peace also has her crowns with which she crowns the victors who have subdued their adversaries in diverse encounters: to him who has vanquished voluptuousness she gives the palm of chastity; to him who has conquered anger and injustice, the diadem of patience; and to him who has despised wealth, the crown of the victor of avarice. It is the glory of faith to bear the evils of this world in the hope of future reward; and he whom prosperity does not render proud, obtains the glory of humility. He who is merciful towards the poor will be rewarded with eternal riches; while he who envieth not, but loves his brethren in sweetness and union, will be honoured with the recompense of peace and love. This path of virtue the blessed servant of God, Vincent de Paul, has not only traversed so as to receive these palms of victory and crowns of justice, but by his labours and example he has also led many others. For, like a valiant soldier of God, rising above the wickedness and sin which surrounded him, he took part in the contest that opened out before him, excelling others by his valour; and even to extreme old age fought bravely and faithfully against the princes, the powers and the masters of the world of darkness, and at last was

worthy to be crowned by the hand of the Lord in the land of eternal bliss. Now God, who alone can accomplish great things, has not only rewarded His servant in heaven with eternal happiness, but has also wished to render him glorious on earth by signs and miracles, and especially at a time when, in France, innovators, by false and fictitious miracles, are trying to spread their errors, to trouble the peace of the Catholic Church, and to separate the simple-minded from union with the Roman See.

“In obedience then to the divine will, to excite the faithful to run in the way of salvation, to repress the wickedness of the perverse and confound the malice of heretics, We have decreed to-day, by apostolic authority, that all the faithful committed to Our unworthy care, shall render to the servant of God, Vincent de Paul, the veneration and honour due to the saints. Let the Church, then, rejoice and be glad that God has given her this new patron, who will offer his prayers to the Lord for the sins of the world. Let all the faithful praise him, and pay him the honour by which God is glorified in His saints. Let us celebrate in psalms, hymns and spiritual canticles, in compunction of heart and charity towards the poor, the glorious victory and spiritual triumph of this servant of God over the world, the flesh and the devil. Let temples be built in his honour to the Immortal God ; but let us who are the temples of the Holy Ghost fear to violate and sully ourselves by the stains of human perversity. Let us act in such a manner that nothing impure or profane shall enter into the temples of God, that is into our souls, lest in His anger He should abandon these temples wherein He dwells. In memory of Vincent, and on His altars, let gifts and presents be offered ; but let us also offer our bodies as a living, holy oblation, pleasing to God, and as a testimony of our reasonable obedience. Lastly, let his statues and sacred images be the objects of honour and religious veneration ; but above all, let us apply ourselves carefully, with the help of divine grace, to the task of copying and representing in ourselves, as far as each one’s weakness will permit, his exalted virtue and holiness of life.

“Born of very poor but pious parents, in a hamlet called Ranquines, in the diocese of Dax, Vincent de Paul from his youth, like another Abel, tended his father’s flocks in such a manner as to draw down on himself and his labours the blessing and grace of God. Living in innocence, he offered to God, by his savings and privations, an agreeable sacrifice of piety, for he often divided amongst the poor the flour he used to bring home from the mill, and even the bread given him by his parents for his own

modest sustenance. Thus he consecrated to virtue that which he took away from his own means of support, and fed the poor by his own abstinence and fasts. The burning charity of the pious child found no obstacle in his poverty, and though whatever he could spare from his own resources was very small, yet the greatness of his soul far surpassed the narrow limits of his means. Like that poor widow who merited the praise of our Lord for having given, not out of her abundance, but out of her poverty, so he once gave, to a poor man whom he met, a half-crown which he had slowly saved up, by his labour, thrift and daily economy.

“His father, having withdrawn him from a rural and pastoral life, sent him to Dax to be educated at a monastery of the fathers of the order of Saint Francis. Here he pursued his studies with so much care and diligence, with such purity of morals and love of God, that he was an example to his companions and an object of admiration to his masters. Afterwards at Toulouse, and subsequently at Saragossa, he assiduously applied himself to the study of theology. Chaste, humble, and modest, such indeed as those should be who are called to the heritage of the Lord, he ascended through each ecclesiastical order to the sublime dignity of the priesthood.

“Scarcely had he been raised to this high dignity than his reputation for virtue and learning spread so rapidly that, in his absence and without his knowledge, he was nominated to a rich benefice. To this, however, he freely relinquished his claim, when he found he could not take possession of it without going to law; for he much preferred to suffer injustice and fraud than to take legal proceedings against a brother priest, and thus freely forfeited a rich income, which he could not obtain without one of those lawsuits that an ecclesiastic, as he himself used to say, should absolutely fly from.

“Nevertheless, that he might not be a burden to others, and that he might by honest toil and praiseworthy industry furnish means of support for himself and his mother, he taught the humanities in a country town called Buzet, in the diocese of Toulouse, and afterwards in that city itself. His great care and anxiety was, not so much to give his young scholars a brilliant but wholly secular education, as to lead their souls to seek eagerly after heavenly wisdom, and to form their characters according to the virtuous principles and lofty sanctity of the Christian religion. Hence it was that gentlemen eagerly handed over their children to his care, in order that, in such a school of piety and under the



guidance of a man of such high principle, they might advance in the way of the Lord and in the science of the saints.

“Having gone to Marseilles to collect a sum of money bequeathed to him as a legacy, he was returning by sea to Narbonne when he fell into the hands of the Turks, who slew the captain of the vessel, some of the passengers, and wounded Vincent with an arrow. They afterwards stripped him of his clothes, loaded him with chains, and led him captive to Africa. He underwent many bitter sufferings from the cruelty of the Turks rather than abandon the law of the Lord, but he well knew that the sufferings of time bear no proportion to the glory that is to be revealed in us in eternity.

“It is related that seeing one of his fellow-slaves quite worn out by the heavy weight of his chains, and having no other means of relieving the misery of the unhappy victim, he loaded himself with his fetters, and thus relieved the sufferings of his companion at the cost of much bitter anguish to himself. The last of his masters (for he had three in the course of his captivity), a man of cruel disposition, employed him in the laborious work of the cultivation of the soil. While thus engaged he was often visited by one of his master's wives, who, though born a Mahometan, was nevertheless most anxious to be instructed in the truths and precepts of the Christian religion. One day after much questioning on God and the Christian religion, she told him to sing her some of the songs of Sion, whereupon the servant of God began the psalm, ‘By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Sion,’ as well as other pious canticles. Now whilst the sacred song of the Lord thus sung by Vincent was re-echoing in the uncircumcised ears of the Mahometan woman, God touched her heart so as to let her taste some of the delights of heavenly sweetness. Accordingly, on her return home she sought her husband, who had abandoned the Christian faith to follow the ravings of Mahomet, and reproached him with having abjured his religion, which appeared to her very beautiful, as much from its teachings, which she had gathered from her slave's words, as from the unusual pleasure she had experienced at the singing of the canticle, a pleasure so intense as that she did not hope to experience the like in the paradise of her fathers. Moved by the woman's words, the wretched apostate cast a glance on his fearful condition, deplored it, and, with the aid and advice of his holy slave Vincent, resolved to abandon it. Having put his affairs in order, he and Vincent escaped from the hands of the Turks in a small vessel, and fled to Avignon, in France, where Vincent

presented him to the vice-legate of the Apostolic See, who, according to the sacred rites, imposed a penance on him and reconciled him to the Church.

“After this the servant of God betook himself to Rome, there to honour the sacred relics of the martyrs whose blood has purified a city, which, from being the seat of superstition, has become the mother and mistress of religion. He came, moreover, to prostrate himself at the tombs of the Apostles and to venerate the chair of Peter, the honour of which is preserved even in Us, his unworthy successor.

“On his return to France, following the advice of a man of eminent piety, Peter Bérulle, the founder of the Congregation of the Oratory of Jesus, and afterwards Cardinal of the Holy Roman Church, he undertook parochial work, at first in the diocese of Paris, and afterwards in that of Lyons. Here, whilst endeavouring with all his might to be the model of his flock, he guided the sheep that had been entrusted to him in the way of the Lord and strengthened them by his words and example. As the harvest indeed was great and the labourers few, he took into his house young ecclesiastics, whom he reared up and trained, living in community with them and instructing them in the law of God, so that in after years they might edify the Church of the Lord by the Divine Word and by salutary doctrine.

“The fame of Vincent’s piety and the odour of his holy life having reached Saint Francis of Sales, the latter proposed him as director to the religious of the Visitation, for whom a convent had been recently erected in Paris. In this onerous charge, a watchful guardian of the holy servants of God, a prudent director of souls, he proved and manifested by his works the truth and justice of the judgment of the holy Bishop, who openly avowed that he did not know a better priest than Vincent. For forty years the blessed servant of God guided these consecrated virgins along the way of salvation with a rare prudence, tact and watchfulness, so that they might, having renounced the concupiscence of the flesh and having been consecrated to God in body and soul, finish the good work begun in them, and by fidelity to the divine counsels, at length attain to the recompense promised by God to His faithful servants.

“The ardent charity of Vincent could not, however, be confined within the cloisters of a convent. Knowing well that there is no work more useful or excellent than the care and sanctification of souls, in order to wage a spiritual combat against the concupiscence of the flesh and the corruption of the world, against the

pride and wickedness of the age, against the vice and misery of the sons of Adam, against the ignorance of the young—in a word, against the spirits of darkness—he laboured hard to form armies of devoted soldiers, who would fight the battles of the Lord. Thus it was that in 1625 he established the Congregation of Secular Priests of the Mission, who, despising and abandoning the delights of the world, joined together in the most pure and holy bonds of community life, and possessing nothing of their own, were to spend their lives in prayer, study and spiritual exercises. They were to labour to instruct the secular clergy in the knowledge of God, in ecclesiastical ceremonies, in the duties of the sacred ministry, and also to incite the laity to walk in the way of salvation by bringing before their minds the commandments of God and the truths of religion. They were to bind themselves to God, by a perpetual vow to spend themselves in the apostolic labours of the missions, particularly in towns, villages and rural districts where the light of gospel truth shines but rarely on men seated in darkness and in the shadow of death. Disturbed by no ambitious schemes, agitated by no perverse disposition of mind, and free from all petty jealousies, they were to lead a life of sweetest union, completely devoted to God and their neighbour's salvation, which must needs be an offering truly pleasing in the eyes of the Author of all good.

“Christian charity towards our neighbour, which flows from the love of God as from its source, and rises through a series of wonderful gradations to the perfection of divine love, is not merely solicitous for the salvation of the soul, but also provides for the needs of the body. Hence it was that the servant of God, inflamed with perfect charity, sought to aid and comfort both soul and body, to save as far as possible the one and the other, making, however, the wants of the body subservient to the salvation of the soul, which was always the first object of his anxious care. The bowels of his pity being touched at the misery and sorrows of the unfortunate, especially of the poor and aged, of children and young girls who, not able by reason of their infirmity and weakness to aid themselves, and often deprived of necessary assistance, are accordingly bowed down under the weight of their miseries, he founded the Sisters of Charity, whose end is to work day and night in the service of the poor and afflicted.

“Furthermore, in every parish, not only in those of cities, but in those of towns and villages, he established ladies' associations to solace, by their tender care and watchful solicitude, the pains and anguish of the unfortunate; to procure spiritual and temporal

remedies for the sick, means of help and relief for the distressed, money for the needy, clothing for the naked, and consolation for the afflicted. He laboured, moreover, to establish, preserve and extend in many places several communities of nuns, principally Sisters of the Cross, Sisters of Providence, and Sisters of Saint Genevieve, who spend their lives in training poor girls in employment suitable to their sex, and in teaching them the lessons of Christian morality, so that they may not when grown up fall into sin through ignorance of the laws of our Lord and the divine mysteries ; or lest, being idly disposed, they neglect their home duties and fall into the snares of Satan ; or finally, being unfitted for manual labour and overcome by domestic troubles and cares, they should be driven through want and misery to lives of vice and sin.

“ Moreover, he built an asylum for lunatics, a house of correction for young men of depraved habits, and a spacious hospital for the maintenance and support of old and disabled workmen. Finally, owing to his strenuous exertions, two hospitals were built and endowed by royal bounty in Paris and Marseilles, where the poor sick galley-slaves, hitherto thrown like beasts into dens, received every corporal and spiritual comfort.

“ The remarkable uprightness and integrity of Vincent shone with daily increasing splendour the more he tried to conceal his virtue. He was appreciated by Louis XIII., of glorious memory, who in his lifetime made use of him to distribute his private alms, and asked his advice as to the nomination to episcopal sees and ecclesiastical benefices, and who at his death wished to be encouraged and consoled by Vincent in that last momentous struggle.

“ After the death of this King, Anne of Austria, his wife, of glorious memory, Queen-Regent of France, summoned Vincent, in spite of his reluctance and unwillingness, to the Holy Council of Conscience. As for him, in the Louvre among the courtiers, at home among his disciples of the Mission, in public places among his fellow-citizens, in private houses among the needy and unfortunate, in hospitals among the aged and sick, in towns and villages among peasants and labourers, in the monasteries of consecrated virgins, in ecclesiastical assemblies, always and everywhere he fulfilled the duties of charity, spread the light of sanctity and diffused the good odour of Christ ; for even in royal palaces, despising the vanity of the world and spurning its riches and honours, he ever kept his thoughts turned towards God and fixed on heavenly things. Hence, in the Council of Conscience

it was always his chief care to propose the most worthy for parochial prebends, ecclesiastical dignities and benefices, which are the property of the poor and the patrimony of Christ.

“During his earthly pilgrimage, whilst he sojourned with those companions of his labours whom with himself he had wished to bind by vow, to teach the mysteries of the Catholic faith and the divine commandments to the poor country-people, as well as to labour in the education of the clergy and in other charitable works, being gifted with strength from on high, he ever showed himself a faithful servant, a courageous and indefatigable labourer in the vineyard of the Lord.

“Because he had made no efforts, like some, to attain to the superiority of his disciples, but had rather been forced to accept it, he so acted as to embrace all in the bowels of the most intimate charity. He took care that sadness should not cast down, nor worldly thoughts torment any of his disciples, and with the anxious care of a father he watched that this one should not be worn out through overwork, nor that one grow dull through excessive inaction; rousing the strong and restraining the over-zealous, he lightened the sweet yoke of Christ for all, and averted the snares of the devil. Uniting all in the bonds of a spiritual brotherhood and in the perfect charity of Christ, he exhorted them both by word and example to strive earnestly to acquire the Christian virtues.

“He who outstripped all by reason of his sanctity and the dignity of his position, placed himself below all in humble self-abasement. Often and in public he declared that he was a slothful and unprofitable servant, a peasant's son, formerly employed in tending sheep. In a general assembly he resigned the generalship of his Congregation, affirming in his humility that he was incapable of supporting its burden; he repeatedly asked that another should be put in his place, and it required the reiterated supplications of the whole assembly and a sort of holy violence to compel him to retain the office. The more he ascended the heights of sanctity by the knowledge and love of God, the more he lowered himself by the knowledge and contempt of himself. Hence he discharged the most menial duties of the house, and often, prostrate at the feet of his disciples and bathed in tears, begged their pardon for having scandalised them by his bad example. By his admirable works of piety and his eminent virtues he had acquired the highest favour at court; the Queen of France had the greatest esteem for him; the bishops, cardinals, all the highest dignitaries in Church and State, men of all

ranks and conditions, held him in the greatest respect and honour. But the servant of God, humbling himself before the Author of all good, showed nothing in his words or actions that savoured of pride or vanity, arrogance or forwardness ; for everything in him, regulated and disposed according to Christian discipline and evangelical holiness, clearly showed that there was nothing dark or hidden in the soul of him whose exterior shone with such resplendent virtues.

“When the evils of the time and the wild disorders of civil war had weakened the holiness of the French clergy by opening a door to ignorance and corruption, every thought and effort of Vincent was directed to the restoration of the honour of God’s house and the re-establishment of ecclesiastical discipline. To restore to the latter its full strength and vigour, which had been weakened by vice, he established religious houses intended to receive clerics who were destined to be promoted to sacred orders, so that they might there be instructed by himself, or his associates of the Mission, in the celebration of the sacred functions and in the formation of those holy dispositions which befit the dignity of their state. By this means the splendour of the sacred ceremonies as well as their due and reverential observance were restored to many churches in France.

“Furthermore, he brought priests together on fixed days to confer on sacred subjects and to exercise themselves in theological disputations, that thus they might learn how to preach sound doctrine and refute the errors of their opponents.

“Moses, before being placed by God at the head of the people of Israel, to deliver them from bondage, to lead them through the desert, to sacrifice to God upon the mountain, and to bring them into the land of promise, fled from the din of Pharaoh’s court into solitude. Vincent taught this lesson to those clerics who, in the dry and barren land of this life, are destined to serve at the altar of the Lord, and to lead, by word and example, God’s faithful people who are tending to their heavenly home, after shaking off the yoke of the evil one. He told them to withdraw from the tumult of the world into a holy retirement, before ascending through the ecclesiastical grades, that they might apply themselves for some days to meditation on divine things and to the consideration of the duties of their ministry.

“The servant of God, Vincent, was not only an excellent instructor of the ministers of the altar, he was also the model of a good and faithful administrator. He was the refuge of all in misery and want, sometimes even giving that which seemed

necessary for himself or his missionaries. He relieved all classes of destitute persons with such liberal alms that he was commonly called the Father of the Poor. Although advanced in years, he bestowed the most painstaking care on the apostolic work of the holy missions. Borne aloft on the wings of charity, overcoming every obstacle and the infirmity of old age, he hastened hither and thither to bear the light of Gospel truth and the knowledge of the divine commands to those who walked in darkness and in the shadow of death. He went especially to the poor inhabitants of country towns and villages, who, deprived of the light of Christian faith, and groping their way in the night of ignorance, were led back by him to the ways of the Lord. And as charity has no bounds, the virtue of the servant of God was not pent up within the limits of France ; no, it spread and shone brightly in all directions. To propagate faith and devotion he sent evangelical workers from among his disciples, not only to Italy, Poland, Scotland and Ireland, but also to Barbary, to the Indies and to the most distant countries, in order that the zeal of his missionaries, when it had dispelled the darkness of idolatry, might lead those people to light and truth.

“ In distant provinces, whilst seeking the salvation of souls, he did not neglect to provide for bodily needs, in order to win carnal men by temporal assistance. Lorraine, Champagne and Picardy, ravaged by war, pestilence and famine, were generously succoured by the sums of money he sent them, and which were distributed by the faithful ministry of the Sisters of Charity. Even in provinces still more distant he came to the relief of those afflicted by want and other calamities, and when the city of Paris itself suffered cruelly from scarcity of provisions, he fed in his house nearly two thousand poor.

“ Although continually occupied with many and various matters of court, of his Congregation, of other establishments which he had founded, or those whose management had been confided to him, in all of which he rendered unwearied services for the glory of God, nevertheless he never repulsed any applicant, but supplied the needs of all, solaced the anguish of all, and embraced all in Jesus Christ. In truth, it was a wonderful thing that he refused no one access to him, that he lent a ready ear to all demands, that he answered with kindness and welcomed with sweetness, that he aroused the jealousy of none, but that, making himself all to all, he cared for the bodies of some, healed the souls of others, and according to the necessities of each, supplied some with money, food and clothing, others with his doctrine and

instructions. Thus he showed that if we do not owe all to all, to all at least we owe charity, and to none injustice. So far was he from avenging—and he could have easily done so—the injustices which he suffered from others, that he was never even heard to complain of them ; nay, the humble sentiments he had of himself made him believe, whenever such injustices were done him, that he truly deserved them. He bore them with such patience that he asked pardon on his knees of those who insulted him, and when struck on one cheek he humbly presented the other.

“ On one occasion some soldiers, blinded by rage and passion, after wounding a poor artisan, were pursuing him with drawn swords to kill him. Vincent shielded the man with his person, and put his life in manifest danger, that he might gain to God him whom he had snatched from the point of death, at the peril of his own life. The soldiers, astonished at such great and exceptional strength of soul, and softened by the words of the servant of God, quietly departed, leaving the poor man unhurt.

“ But since the harvest of the Lord, of which We are labourers, though watered from on high by the grace of God, is protected by faith, tilled by fastings, sown by alms-deeds and rendered fruitful by prayer, Blessed Vincent did not neglect to bring the flesh under subjection to the spirit. Fearful lest the precious harvest should be lost, and that in the midst of thorns and briars there should spring up a crop not fit to be stored in the granaries of the Lord, but worthy only to be cast into the fire, he subdued his flesh by hair shirts, fasts and other penitential exercises, especially in times of calamities in France and the Catholic Church.

“ If his advice were asked on any grave and important matter, or if any difficult or unusual undertaking were proposed to him, like the holy King David he consulted God before beginning, and humbly asked the Father of Lights to illumine his soul with the splendour of His brightness, that he might know what he was to answer or what he was to do. This being clearly seen and known, he begged God to prevent him with His divine grace, and to aid and strengthen him to bring the matter to a successful issue. Every time he left his room to appear in public, he prostrated himself before God, and by short but fervent prayers implored the divine assistance, that whilst mixing with the world and treating of earthly things, which was so disagreeable to him, he might not be sullied with the ungodliness of the children of men. Scarcely had he returned home, than entering the secret recesses of his heart he subjected the most hidden movements of his



conscience to examination, and in the midst of his conflicting thoughts, some accusing, others excusing, he carefully examined, zealously corrected and secretly punished any imprudent word that had escaped from his lips, or any inconsiderate act that he had done. Thus he was ever vigilant in keeping the ways of the Lord, who has commanded us to observe His precepts with the utmost fidelity.

“Devoted to assiduous prayer, neither men nor business, events prosperous or adverse, could turn him away from the contemplation of divine things. He had God always before his mind. Ever walking in the divine presence, by assiduous care and holy industry he had reached a state in which every creature recalled to his mind the Creator of all things, and manifesting the glory and praises of God, impelled him to the contemplation of heavenly beauty. Thus always recollected and gentle, affable and benign, preserving in all things an admirable equanimity, he was neither elated by success nor depressed by failure. Hence he could say with the prophet: ‘I saw the Lord before me, and had Him ever in my presence; for He is on my right hand, that I be not disturbed.’

“Living so as to be able to offer daily the unbloody sacrifice of the altar, he never refrained from doing so. When, for some months before his death, he was unable to stand upright on account of the considerably increasing infirmity of his limbs, he assisted every day at the sacrifice of the mass. Comforted by the bread of angels, after an humble thanksgiving, he recited with deep feeling the usual prayers prescribed by the Church for those in their agony, as if he himself were soon to take flight from the prison of the body to his heavenly home.

“He was animated with a lively faith, and all his life was an intrepid defender and champion of it. When the tempest of heresy had sprung up in France, sweeping all things before it in its fury, the servant of God was sorely grieved at the sight of the faith of many being tainted with Jansenistic poison, at the simplicity of those who had become the tools of crafty heretics, and at the great number of persons of all ranks who were led astray by these pernicious errors. Enkindled, then, with a holy zeal for God’s glory, he believed it his duty to take up the weapons of faith against the common enemy, and seeking to please God rather than men, urged the sacred pastors of the Church to guard the flock of Jesus Christ and not to suffer the ravening wolves to prey in secret on their Master’s sheep. Thus, by all the entreaties and exhortations in his power, he caused eighty-five French

bishops, who were afterwards joined by others, to refer this insidious malady and secret spring of contagion to the chair of Peter, the culminating point of the Apostolate, to which all scandals and evils that spring up in the kingdom of God are to be referred, but more especially those that wound faith, so that there, where faith itself can suffer no weakening or decay, its losses may be repaired as soon as possible. Hence it was that the bishops of France, in their letters addressed to Our predecessor Innocent X., of happy memory, most humbly prayed and besought him to condemn with his apostolic voice those errors which were beginning to spring up, in order that the Church being re-established in her rules and confirmed by a decree whose proclamation was dreaded by the intriguers, every channel would be closed to those men who, furnished with perverse ambiguities and cunning sophistries, pretending to defend the Catholic faith and exhaling a deadly poison, were seeking to mislead and corrupt the hearts of well-meaning men, and to subvert the true doctrine relating to free-will, the grace of God and man's redemption by the passion and death of Jesus Christ.

"As soon as the answer came from Rome, Vincent received the decree of the successor of Saint Peter with heartfelt respect and submission. Rejoicing in the Lord that all discussion was closed by the judgment of the Apostolic See, he laboured with the utmost zeal to put an end to the error once for all. His first care and solicitude was to keep far removed from all the religious communities which he had either founded or was directing this hidden plague afflicting the Catholic religion, lest through the contagion of one infected member the healthiest should be corrupted. Moreover, as he knew it was a great and pious duty to find out the hiding-places of the wicked and there give battle to the evil one, whom they indeed serve, with that apostolic liberty which so becomes a servant of God in matters of faith, he did not cease from exhorting the King, Queen and their ministers not only to lead back the refractory to obedience by just punishments, but to drive forth from the kingdom of France as enemies of the public safety those who persisted in their errors. Thus the rigour of the secular power would unite with the mildness of the Church, which, content with ecclesiastical judgment and most averse to cruel retributions, is nevertheless aided by the stern enactments of Christian princes, since the rebellious sometimes have recourse to spiritual remedies through fear of corporal punishment.

"At last, full of years and of merits, having reached the eighty-

fifth year of his age, worn out no less by age than by those corporal works that he, ever equally intent on pious enterprises and the salvation of souls, had joyously undertaken and courageously carried out even to his last breath, fortified with the sacraments of the Church, despising this world and eagerly longing for heaven, surrounded by his priests, who rendered to him the last rites of religion, answering the familiar words, 'Incline unto my aid, O God,' which they suggested to him, with the response, 'O Lord, make haste to help me,' filled with confidence, not in his own virtue, but in the divine succour, he peacefully passed away at Paris, in the house of Saint-Lazare, belonging to the Secular Priests of the Mission, on the fifth day before the kalends of October in the year 1660.

"After his death the fame of his sanctity spread far and wide. God Himself bore witness to it by many signs and miracles, and thus through His admirable providence the greatest veneration was excited around the remains of His servant. From this it was clearly seen in what honour God held that soul, since his now inanimate body so clearly revealed the presence of the Author of Life.

"On this account, and according to custom, two processes were instituted at Paris, by the authority of the ordinary, one to report on the reputation for sanctity of the deceased, his virtues and miracles, and the other to show that no cultus had hitherto been paid him. These processes having been begun by the permission of Our predecessor, Clement XI., of happy memory, and their validity having been recognised by the Sacred Congregation of Rites, on October 4, 1709, the commission for the introduction of the cause was signed. Having complied with all the formalities prescribed by the decrees of the Apostolic See in causes of this sort, the question of the evidence of his practice of the theological and cardinal virtues in an heroic degree was discussed. After the last general meeting of Our venerable brothers, the cardinals of the Holy Roman Church, who were members of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, Our predecessor, Benedict XIII., of pious memory, ordered on September 21, 1727, the publication of the decree confirming the proof of his practice of the theological and cardinal virtues in an heroic degree.

"The examination of miracles was then proceeded with, and was concluded in three meetings, the last general meeting having been held on the twelfth day of the month of July, in the same year, at which the following four miracles were approved: First,

the sudden cure of Claude Joseph Compion from blindness ; second, the instantaneous restoration of speech and strength to Mary Anne l'Huillier, a child of eight years, dumb from her birth and unable to move her limbs ; third, the instantaneous cure of Sister Mathurine Guérin of an inveterate and malignant ulcer in her leg ; and fourth, the sudden cure of Alexandre-Philippe le Grand of an inveterate and long-standing paralysis.

“The same Benedict, Our predecessor, confirmed the decision of the said Congregation of Rites with regard to these miracles, and on August 13, 1729, approving the decree of the same Congregation of Rites declaring the solemn beatification of the servant of God, inscribed Vincent de Paul among the number of the Blessed, and granted by his apostolic authority that every year, in certain places, on the anniversary day of the death of the blessed servant of God, an office should be recited and the mass of a confessor non-pontiff celebrated in his name, according to the rubrics of the breviary and the Roman missal. He also decreed that the name of the same servant of God should be inserted amongst those of the saints that are read in the Roman martyrology, and he furthermore ordained the public recitation, at the second nocturn, of the proper lessons of the same Blessed Vincent, approved by the said Congregation of Rites, with the consent of the promoter of the faith.

“Remissorial and compulsorial letters having been drawn up by apostolic authority, for the completion of the usual process on the new miracles that had been wrought since the decree of the beatification of the same servant of God, and this process having been concluded, and its validity recognised after the usual meetings known as antepreparatory and preparatory, the examination of the miracles was handed over to Us who, by a disposition of the divine goodness, have succeeded Benedict XIII. in the sacred burden of the Apostolate. A general Congregation having been held in Our presence on January 30, 1736, after hearing the opinions of Our venerable brothers and imploring the divine assistance, on June 24 of the same year, We fully approved of two of the seven miracles which had been brought forward for examination, namely, the instantaneous cure of Mary Teresa de Saint Basile from putrid and inveterate ulcers combined with a long and obstinate retention of urine and an enormous dropsy ; also the instantaneous cure of Francis Richer from a complete and inveterate hernia.

“When this was accomplished, and a general Congregation had been held in Our presence, it was proposed for deliberation

whether the solemn canonisation of Blessed Vincent de Paul could be safely proceeded with, and Our venerable brothers, the cardinals of the Holy Roman Church, having given their unanimous consent to it, We solemnly pronounced the decree for the completion of the process.

“Several months afterwards We ordered, according to custom, a secret consistory to be convoked, wherein Our dear son Anthony Felix Zondanari, cardinal priest of the Church of Saint-Praxedes, in his own name and in that of the entire Congregation of Sacred Rites, declared in a report, first, that the writings, the process and all the acts of the cause had been carried out according to rule, and that they had the full force of authority and lawful proof. Then after a careful exposition of the life, virtues and miracles of the Blessed Vincent, he declared that he and the other cardinals of the said Congregation were unanimously of the opinion that the Blessed Vincent might, if it seemed good to Us, be enrolled in the catalogue of the saints, an opinion which was shared by all the cardinals present.

“Wherefore in such a grave and holy affair, having omitted absolutely none of the necessary precautions prescribed by custom and the rules of Our predecessors, We decreed that the cause might be advanced ; and some days after, a public consistory was held, in which Our dear son Thomas Antamori, consistorial advocate of Our court, having spoken at length on the admirable charity of Blessed Vincent, the innocence of his life and his miracles, humbly begged Us in the name of Our dearest son in Jesus Christ, Louis, the most Christian King of France, and of Our dearest daughter in Jesus Christ, Mary, his wife, most Christian Queen of France, and in the name of all other Catholic princes, and of Our venerable brothers the archbishops, bishops and clergy of the kingdom of France, but above all, in the name of the entire Congregation of the Secular Priests of the Mission, to be pleased to enrol Blessed Vincent in the catalogue of the saints. We, therefore, considering the importance of such a step, and being of opinion that more mature deliberation with Our venerable brothers, the cardinals of the Holy Roman Church, and the other archbishops and bishops, was necessary, ordered public prayers and fasts, and exhorted all the faithful of Christ to beg God, along with Us, to give Us His spirit of wisdom and knowledge, that We might learn those heavenly secrets which human wisdom cannot comprehend, and to enlighten the eyes of Our soul, that We might ascertain in so important a matter what We should decide so as to be in accordance with the divine will.

"We afterwards held a semi-public consistory, at which the patriarchs, archbishops and bishops then present at the Roman court, as well as Our protonotaries, to the number of twelve, and the auditors of the Sacred Apostolic Palace, assisted by Our command. In their presence, having spoken at length on the eminent sanctity of the servant of God and the fame of his miracles ; having again enumerated the petitions of Catholic princes, and above all, the ardent prayers of the Secular Priests of the Mission, We invited them all to manifest their opinions by free suffrage ; and they, having given expression, in turn, to their firm convictions, answered with one voice, praising God, that Blessed Vincent should be ranked among the holy confessors. Seeing their general agreement, with the most heartfelt emotion We rejoiced in the Lord for their unanimity, because His name should be glorified in Blessed Vincent, and because He moved Our hearts and enlightened Our minds to honour His faithful servant as much as mortal man can do. We then appointed the day for his canonisation, and We exhorted them to persevere in prayer and fasting to obtain for Us light and strength from on high to accomplish so great a work.

"Having therefore exactly complied with all that was required by the sacred constitutions and customs of the Roman Church, on this day, Most Holy Trinity Sunday, We proceeded to the sacred basilica of Saint John Lateran, which was appropriately decorated, accompanied by Our venerable brothers, the cardinals of the Holy Roman Church, the patriarchs, archbishops and bishops ; the prelates of the Roman court, Our officers and domestic staff, the secular and regular clergy, and a great concourse of people. Here Our dearly beloved son Neri Corsini, cardinal-deacon of the Holy Roman Church, Our nephew in the flesh, had once more repeated to Us by the same advocate, Thomas Antamori, the petitions for the decree of canonisation. Then after the chanting of the sacred prayers and litanies, and an humble prayer for the grace of the Holy Spirit : In honour of the Holy and Undivided Trinity, for the exaltation of the Catholic faith and the spread of the Christian religion, by the authority of Our Lord Jesus Christ, of the blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, and by Our own ; after mature deliberation and the repeated invocation of the divine assistance ; with the advice and consent of Our venerable brothers, the cardinals of the Holy Roman Church, the patriarchs and holy bishops present in the city, We have decreed and defined that Blessed Vincent de Paul is a saint, and We have enrolled him in the catalogue of the saints as by

the tenor of these presents We do now decree, define and enrol. We have, moreover, ordained and do ordain that all the faithful of Christ honour and venerate him as being truly a saint. We furthermore determine and decree that churches and altars be built and consecrated in his honour throughout the universe, wherein sacrifices may be offered to God ; and that each year, on the nineteenth day of July, his memory be celebrated, with pious devotion, as a holy confessor non-pontiff.

“By the same authority We have remitted and mercifully do remit in the Lord, according to the accustomed form of the Church, to all the faithful of Christ who, being truly penitent and having confessed, do visit every year, on the same day of his feast, the tomb wherein his body rests, seven years and seven quarantines of the temporal punishment enjoined on them or which may still be due to them for any reason whatsoever.

“These things having been done, We adored and praised God Almighty the Eternal Father, Our Lord Jesus Christ the King of Glory, the Son of the Eternal Father, and the Paraclete, the Holy Ghost, one only Lord and God. We solemnly chanted the sacred hymn *Te Deum*, and granted to all the faithful then present a plenary indulgence. Then on account of Our bodily infirmities, Our enfeebled health and Our advanced age, We withdrew from the aforesaid Lateran Basilica, leaving there Our venerable brothers, the cardinals of the Holy Roman Church, the archbishops, bishops and all the clergy and people, in presence of whom Our venerable brother, Thomas Rufo, cardinal of the Holy Roman Church, bishop of Palestrina, as senior cardinal present, by Our indult and permission, solemnly celebrated mass with a commemoration of the holy confessor, on the high altar of the said basilica.

“Now it behoves Us to return thanks and give glory to the Eternal God, who has blessed Our fellow-servant with every spiritual benediction, that he might be holy and immaculate in His sight. And since He has given him to Us as a shining light of His temple, in this night of Our sins and tribulations, let Us confidently draw near the throne of divine mercy, imploring, by word and deed, that Saint Vincent may aid the entire Christian world by his merits and example ; that he may help it by his prayers and patronage, and that in time of wrath he may become our reconciliation.

“Furthermore, as it would be too difficult to transmit these original letters to each of those places where they are required, We desire that to their copies, even those printed, provided they

be signed by a public notary and furnished with the seal of a person constituted in ecclesiastical authority, the same credence may be everywhere given as to these presents.

“No one therefore is permitted to violate this page of Our decree, inscription, mandate, statute, concession, bounty and good pleasure, or to temerarily contradict it. And if any one shall presume to attempt to do so, let him know that he will incur the indignation of Almighty God and of the blessed Apostles Peter and Paul.

“Given at Rome, at Saint John Lateran’s, in the year of the Incarnation of Our Lord one thousand seven hundred and thirty-seven, the sixteenth day before the kalends of July, in the seventh year of Our Pontificate.

“✠ CLEMENT,

“*Bishop of the Catholic Church.*”



## CHAPTER V.

### THE RELICS OF SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL AND THEIR DIFFERENT TRANSLATIONS

DURING the celebrations for the canonisation of Saint Vincent, the tomb was again opened, and the remains removed to be placed on the altar. Although in 1712, when it was opened for the first time, the air had entered and somewhat injured the body, and although God had not wished that His servant should enjoy the privilege of complete incorruption, yet this second opening was the occasion of no less consolation and enthusiasm. The sacred remains were enclosed in a beautifully wrought silver and gold coffin, and placed, with the greatest solemnity and rejoicing, above the high altar in the Chapel of Saint-Lazare. There they remained all during the eighteenth century, surrounded with suitable veneration, till the Revolution broke out. Who should have thought that the first outbursts of fury would have been directed against that house of Saint-Lazare, from which had come forth so many inventions of charity and devotedness, and where still two hundred poor were daily fed? But it is precisely such charity that is attacked. Where so much was given to the poor, it was argued, much should be found. It was therefore noised abroad that the granaries of Saint-Lazare were filled with all kinds of provisions, and on July 12 and 13, 1789, the eve of the destruction of the Bastille, two hundred brigands broke into the house. At first they rushed to the vaults, and soon the whole building was inundated with half-drunken men, women and children, who respected nothing. The library was plundered, the archives thrown out of the windows, and the most precious objects broken and trampled upon. Then disappeared those priceless parchments the title-deeds and privileges of the Congregation of the Mission, together with thousands of the letters of Saint Vincent de Paul. Then, too, were lost his two portraits, the mattress on which he died, the candlestick used at his death, his walking-stick, and a number of other objects which had belonged to him, and which were preserved as relics. Fortunately the chapel escaped from the hands of the drunken mob. They either did not recognise it or they respected it, and thus it was

that the sacred remains of our saint were left untouched in their gold and silver coffin resting over the high altar. But what even the people had respected, a greedy Government was not slow to carry off. Some years afterwards, 1792, agents of the Government came to Saint-Lazare and demanded all the objects of gold and silver which the chapel contained. It was thus necessary to deliver up the beautiful coffin with its sacred deposit, and for the time it was feared that the precious remains would be profaned and cast to the winds. But either through contempt, deeming it of little value, or urged by the dying embers of faith even in the heart of a Revolutionist, the commissary of the Government, after taking the gold and silver, consented to leave with the Priests of the Mission the remains of their holy founder. Fearing lest another attack should be made, they were immediately removed, and through the care of Father Daudet, Procurator-General of the Congregation, were placed with M. Clairret, notary of Saint-Lazare, who kept them till 1795, when he returned them to the Priests of the Mission. About ten years later, July 18, 1806, Father Brunet, Vicar-General of the Congregation, transferred them to the novitiate of the Sisters of Charity, at that time in the Rue du Vieux-Colombier, and when in 1815 the sisters took possession of their large house in the Rue du Bac, they placed the sacred remains under one of the altars of their chapel.

But they were not to remain there. These different translations were made without pomp or ceremony. It was reserved for Mgr. Quélen, Archbishop of Paris, to render to the great saint the most solemn homage. When the Priests of the Mission had left the ruins of Saint-Lazare, and taken up their residence in the Rue de Sèvres, they asked and obtained from the Archbishop that the body of their holy founder should be brought to their new home. His Grace consented, and made it known to the diocese in the following words :—

“These venerable remains were formerly preserved with due reverence in Saint-Lazare, which we may justly call the house of the priests and of the poor; for the former came there to be renewed in the spirit of their vocation, and the latter never sought there in vain for assistance in their numerous wants. There is not an aged priest nor a wearied pauper who has not prayed before that rich though modest tomb, where seemed to lie in tranquil sleep, amidst so many whom he had made happy, the true friend of God and man. But an ungrateful and destructive philanthropy disturbed this peace; it envied the handful of that metal which he had spent so lavishly, and with which filial devo-

tion had embellished the last resting-place of a father so virtuous and so charitable. But of what value was the purest gold to his children in comparison with the least portion of his precious remains? Abandoning to cupidity what it sought with an insatiable thirst, driven from their home and despoiled of their property, the Priests of the Mission felt they had lost nothing when they had saved their greatest treasure. Happy in having snatched it from profane hands, they confided it to the care of the Sisters of Charity, whose name is in itself his most beautiful panegyric.

"Surrounded with humble veneration in the seclusion of a seminary, where the charity of Saint Vincent daily brought forth faithful guardians of the foundling and heroic servants of the sick poor, the sacred deposit awaited that royal and public act of gratitude, joined to religious ceremony, which was to bear it in triumph to a new sanctuary, and to pay it solemn homage. By the boundless generosity of our King, a chapel has been erected and dedicated to the holy priest, not far from one of these hospices where religion had confided to the tenderest care the sick whom human skill had despaired of curing. There assemble each day, in a spirit of recollection and prayer, the generous children of Saint Vincent de Paul. There, under the eyes of his pious successors, come numerous levites, as of old, to receive in prayer the light of knowledge, constancy in zeal, and the strength and sweetness which give to evangelical labourers so great an authority, and which they have the good fortune of being able to contemplate so closely in one of the most perfect models. There the faithful come to learn with a glance what is due to divine worship, and the unfortunate, all that their hearts yearn for from priests so fervent. To this new sanctuary, under the eyes of priests and people, it is our intention to bear in triumph the mortal remains of 'the man of God,' who, passing through life doing good to all, has satiated so many poor in Sion, and instructed so many priests to clothe themselves with salvation."

It was necessary, in the first place, to establish the identity of the remains, and this was done at the Archbishop's, on April 6, 1830. A commission, nominated by his Grace, took the greatest pains to inquire most minutely into their history since their first removal. The report of this commission having been read by the learned Abbé Tresvaux, the Archbishop was satisfied as to the identity, and ordered the coffin to be opened. With what emotion they gazed upon the venerable body! The doctors made a minute examination, but there was no doubt. It was the same body as the process-verbal, found in the coffin, described.

Then it was that the veneration of all became evident. Clergy and people, but especially the Priests of the Mission and the Sisters of Charity, showed their devotion. The coffin was at once closed and sealed with the Archbishop's seal till the precious remains could be enclosed in their new case.

That case is indeed splendid. "About six feet long and three feet wide, the arched top and three sides are of glass, and the whole case beautifully carved in silver. At each end, in front, stands a child, also in silver, and more than a foot high. The statues, representing orphans, have their hands joined, and their eyes are fixed with reverence on the relics of their benefactor. A statue of Saint Vincent, kneeling, and supported by a cloud, surmounts the case. He is represented as clad in his soutane and stole, with his eyes and hands raised towards heaven, while around are four angels holding the symbols of different virtues."

It was on April 23, 1830, in presence of Mgr. Quélen, that the body of Saint Vincent de Paul, clad in white silk, with soutane and stole, was placed in this rich case. The countenance done in wax is a true representation, and in the hands is placed the crucifix said to be the one used by Saint Vincent at the death-bed of Louis XIII.

Everything being thus prepared, the next day, at the solemn sound of the bells of Notre-Dame, the sacred remains were transported, and an eloquent panegyric delivered by Abbé Mathieu, afterwards Archbishop of Besançon. On Sunday, April 25, the second Sunday after Easter, solemn High Mass was celebrated by Mgr. Lambruschini, Papal Nuncio, and in presence of twelve bishops. At two o'clock in the afternoon the immense procession started for Saint-Lazare, accompanied by an enthusiastic concourse of people. Thus was Saint Vincent borne in triumph through the streets of Paris, which he had enriched with so many and such noble institutes of charity.

The King, who had failed to be present at the procession, came the next day, together with the princes, princesses, and the whole court, to kneel before the sacred relics. For eight days pilgrims continued to arrive; all Paris was stirred. Not only neighbouring towns but distant cities sent deputations to honour the relics of our saint.

Since then all France has come around that tomb, drawn by the perfume of faith and charity which is radiated from it. What heart, indeed, will not turn in love towards him, who, in our time, has been such a benefactor of humanity, such a personation of charity? <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mgr. Bougaud's work ends here.

## CHAPTER VI.<sup>1</sup>

THE STABILITY AND EXTENSION OF THE WORKS OF SAINT VINCENT DE PAUL—HE IS DECLARED BY THE HOLY SEE PATRON OF WORKS OF CHARITY IN FRANCE, AND AFTERWARDS OF THOSE OF THE WHOLE WORLD

THE men who are truly great are those whose works not only survive them, but whose works time, that destroyer of everything, only serves to strengthen and expand. The Congregation of the Mission, almost completely destroyed by the Revolution, rose from amidst its ruins, and to-day is more numerous and more widespread than in the eighteenth century.

The Sisters of Charity number more than twenty thousand, and are to be found all over the world. The Ladies of Charity have also multiplied, and there is no city, town, or village where ladies of the world may not be met who deem it an honour, after the example of the De Gondis, the D'Aiguillons and the Lamoignons, to seek out the garrets of the poor, to sweep their rooms and to make their beds. But the great work that has brought the name and influence of Vincent de Paul prominently forward is that of the conferences which bear his name. A mustard-seed in the beginning, to-day it is a great tree whose branches cover the earth. Where are there not to be met members of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society in their holy and charitable conferences? They are scattered over two hemispheres, and at present there are more than four thousand branches of this society devoted to the service of the poor.

Whilst all the works instituted by Saint Vincent de Paul have been developing and increasing, many others have sprung up modelled on his, for their founders knew well that they would never discover a more perfect ideal. They call themselves his children, and are animated with his spirit, so much so that Pope Leo XIII., seeing this multiplicity of charitable works all inspired by and modelled on those created by Saint Vincent de Paul,

<sup>1</sup> The documents contained in this chapter have been borrowed from the *Annals of the Congregation of the Mission*, a publication of the Vincentian Fathers.

decided to honour him with a new and glorious title, that of Patron of Works of Charity.

How did this take place? Let us go back to the beginning and render homage to him who was, perhaps, the first to suggest the idea.

The Abbé Freppel, now Bishop of Angers, in the course of a panegyric preached on the 19th July 1858, in the Church of the Vincentians at Paris, said: "Four centuries prior to Saint Vincent de Paul, one of those men whom it pleases God to raise up from time to time, to manifest His designs, sees himself called to summarise the results of Christian thought from Saint Paul to Saint Augustine, and from Saint Augustine to his own time. Entrusted with such a mighty task, this wonderful man takes hold of everything within his reach, of whatever Christian tradition has bequeathed either of fact or idea; he gathers them together, he combines and co-ordinates them. He begins with reason, which he analyses and examines. He classifies natural truths, disposing them in a majestic peristyle surrounding the sacred edifice of truth; then entering within, he arranges in order the truths of revelation, like so many great columns resting their foundations on earth and pointing towards heaven. He breathes the breath of God into these forms of intelligence, permeating and animating them. He raises aloft this dome of truth, supported by faith, adorned by charity, crowned by hope, until it becomes under his hands a master-work, an edifice like one of those noble monuments of the Middle Ages, rising from subterranean foundations till the pinnacles touch the clouds. You all know this man—Saint Thomas Aquinas; and never did human work manifest in a higher degree the genius of organisation than his theological Summa.

"Now, I maintain that Saint Vincent de Paul, in the seventeenth century, did for charity what, in the thirteenth, the angelic doctor did for faith. He has been, if I may use the expression which best conveys my idea—he has been the Saint Thomas Aquinas of charity. It is the characteristic of his work, the end of his mission. Yes, this man, so simple and so great, has been endowed by God with the genius of organisation, and, like Saint Thomas Aquinas, has likewise bequeathed to the Christian world his Summa, a magnificent Summa—the Summa of his works. He gathered into his own soul all that Catholic devotedness had ever furnished, from which he might learn how to relieve suffering and poverty; and completing the heritage of the past by broader views and new conceptions, he has transmitted to future

generations that organisation of charity which the Catholic Church may justly claim as one of her greatest glories in modern times. Behold what has been the providential mission of this great man."<sup>1</sup>

Twenty-two years after the present Bishop of Angers pronounced these words, our great Pope Leo XIII., by a brief dated 4th of August 1880, declared Saint Thomas Aquinas, Patron of the Schools. We may imagine what hopes were excited by this act in the hearts of the sons of Saint Vincent de Paul. Since Vincent de Paul has been for charity what Thomas Aquinas was for science, why should not an honour analogous to that received by the angelic doctor be decreed to the great organiser of charity in modern times? Why should Saint Vincent de Paul not be declared patron of all charitable works and institutions? Moreover, the attempted secularisation of these works seemed to demand that their supernatural and Christian character should be maintained by the solemn proclamation of an illustrious patron and perfect model. Again, in presence of the exceptional difficulties and necessities of the present day, those who support good works stand in need of being encouraged and spurred on. Many charitable institutions having no special patron would rejoice to be enrolled under the banner of Saint Vincent. Lastly, he may truly be regarded as the father of all those associations that have arisen in the Church mainly through the influence of his mind and heart.

Those sentiments being communicated to Cardinal Guibert, Archbishop of Paris, by the Superior-General of the Vincentians, the Cardinal at once replied to Father Fiat: "I shall make it my special care to ask of the Holy See the favour that you so legitimately desire; many great advantages would arise from it. The members of the conferences of Saint Vincent de Paul are about to celebrate in May the golden jubilee of their foundation. If this favour could be obtained before that time it would be a source of great encouragement for these gentlemen; their zeal would be strengthened and their numbers increased. God grant that it may be so."

The Archbishop set to work at once, and as a matter of prudence first consulted the Cardinal-Prefect of the Congregation of Rites. His reply was favourable, provided that the title asked should be confined to France.

Strengthened by this reply, Cardinal Guibert wrote to the French bishops to ask their support. He also sent them "a petition to be presented to the Pope," that they might affix their

<sup>1</sup> Mgr. Freppel, vol. ii.

signatures thereto, if they thought proper. The petition was signed unanimously.

*The Cardinal's Letter.*

“PARIS, 28th February 1883.

“MY LORD,—Your lordship is aware that the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul is about to celebrate, in the opening days of next May, the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of this charitable institution, so well adapted to modern needs, and which is spread to-day throughout the entire world. A meeting of delegates of the Saint Vincent de Paul Society in France and other countries will be held in Paris, to thank God for the protection He has been graciously pleased to afford it in the past, as well as to beg similar blessings for the future.

“Now I have been asked by some fervent Christians if it would be possible to obtain from the Holy See that Saint Vincent de Paul be declared patron, in the Church, of all works of charity, without prejudice to particular patrons, as Saint Thomas has been declared patron of all institutions of Catholic higher education.

“The idea seems to me, my lord, to be inspired by a sentiment of true piety; its realisation would aid very much in the propagation of the Society, and would give a fresh impetus to Christian charity, at a time when it is of the utmost importance to show the world that the Church alone can maintain union and brotherhood among men.

“Nevertheless, my lord, I thought it was my duty, before making any approach to the Holy See, to ascertain whether such a demand would be opportune. I have been assured in reply that a petition of this nature would be very favourably received and examined.

“But such a demand should not be presented by an individual bishop; it is but right that the bishops of the nation that had the honour of giving birth to Saint Vincent de Paul should express their sentiments and wishes to the Vicar of Jesus Christ.

“If you, my lord, share my views as to the opportuneness and the advantages of the privilege which Christian piety seeks for our great Saint Vincent de Paul, you will kindly affix your signature to the enclosed petition, and return it to me as soon as possible.

“Accept, my lord, the assurance of my most respectful and devoted regards.

“✠ JOSEPH HIPPOLYTE GUIBERT,  
“*Archbishop of Paris.*”



*Petition of the French Bishops.*

"MOST HOLY FATHER,—The fiftieth year has just opened since the lay society founded under the name and patronage of Saint Vincent de Paul was established in Paris.

"It is with sentiments of the liveliest gratitude and joy that all its members wish to solemnly celebrate this year of jubilee. Nothing is more fitting, for we see in Sacred Scripture how pleasing to God is this custom of men, in the evening of life uniting together after a period of fifty years, to return God solemn thanks for benefits received, as well as to excite themselves to make fresh efforts towards perfection.

"It is becoming that this most praiseworthy Society should honour God with exceptional testimonies of gratitude and joy, when it considers the admirable care Divine Providence has taken of it, from its humble origin to its present marvellous development. In the year 1833 eight young men conferred together on the advisableness of uniting, in order the better to preserve unsullied their Christian faith amidst the dangers that threatened society on all sides. They considered that the exercise of charity towards the poor would be a salutary means of safeguarding their faith.

"They held weekly meetings, called conferences, to deliberate on the means of relieving the misery of the poor whom they visited. At these conferences they made a collection among themselves, and concluded with prayer and pious reading.

"Now God, who ever looks with favour on the humble, beheld these young men animated with a truly Christian spirit, and it pleased His divine will to multiply them to such a degree, that the Gospel parable of the mustard-seed might well be applied to their association, for that little seed has become a great tree, so that the birds of the air come and dwell in the branches thereof. At the present day there are four thousand conferences of this Society of Saint Vincent de Paul scattered over Europe, Asia, America and other parts of the world.

"But the chief merit of its members is that they have ever shown themselves faithful to the true religious spirit which animated them in the beginning, so that the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul in our day has been, as it were, a nursery of great men, who in every grade of society, scorning human respect, lead lives conformable to the maxims of the Gospel.

"Considering these manifestations of the power and mercy of God, if we may so express our humble belief, we are of the opinion, Most Holy Father, that the Church would add a fresh

splendour to her glory, and give a fresh proof of her power, if Your Holiness would be pleased to extend devotion to Saint Vincent de Paul, by solemnly declaring him patron of all associations and works of charity, without diminishing in the least the honour and dignity of special patrons.

“This, moreover, is not a thing that is new or without precedent in the Church. Has not Benedict XIII., of happy memory, given Saint Aloysius Gonzaga as the patron of youth in recognition of the merit of his innocence and piety? And two years have scarcely elapsed since Your Holiness declared, amidst the applause of the entire world, Saint Thomas Aquinas, the angelic doctor, patron of Catholic higher and university education. Moreover, You expressed Your desire that under this title he should be everywhere honoured and taken as a model and guide.

“It is thus in a manner under the inspiration of the Church herself, and guided by her lights, that we address our petition to Your Holiness, begging You to decree Saint Vincent de Paul patron of all works of charity.

“We read in the Roman breviary for the 19th July, the feast of Saint Vincent de Paul, these words, which are worthy of the greatest consideration and attention: ‘No misery was left unrelieved by Vincent’s paternal heart—Christians groaning beneath the yoke of the Turk, foundlings, incorrigible young men, virgins whose virtue was imperilled, women fallen into evil ways, convicts condemned to the galleys, disabled and infirm artisans, even lunatics, and an immense multitude of poor, all were assisted by him. He opened charitable asylums that remain to this day, wherein they were received and nourished by his pious care. He established numerous associations to visit and succour the poor, amongst all of which the most remarkable are the celebrated Ladies’ Association of Charity, and the community known as the Sisters of Charity, which is spread throughout the entire world.’ Surely these words of the breviary are an admirable panegyric in praise of Saint Vincent de Paul.

“But are we not filled to-day with sentiments of still greater admiration, when we behold Saint Vincent, now dead for more than two hundred years, ever animating with his word and guiding with his counsel, if we may so speak, those who lovingly devote themselves to the fulfilment of these works of charity. The Priests of the Congregation of the Mission which he founded, walking faithfully in the footsteps of their Father, in the paths of humility and Christian simplicity, continue to zealously apply themselves to the evangelisation of the poor and the direction of

charitable associations. The Ladies' Association, far from losing any of its primitive vigour, is a fountain in our midst, of the most abundant blessings. The Sisters of Charity fly in thousands to all quarters of the world. It would be true, perhaps, to say that God's promise to Abraham was a prophecy of the blessing He has bestowed on Saint Vincent, for he indeed has become the leader of a great people, and God is glorified in his name.

"Moreover, the illustrious family of the 'Father of the Poor' has linked to it a multitude of others in the shape of those societies which are honoured by the lustre of his name and which are vivified by his spirit. They are spread far and wide over the globe. They have given birth at Paris to the Congregation, already approved by the Holy See, of the priests and brothers of Saint Vincent de Paul, who principally devote their ministry of faith and charity to the needs of the working classes.

"Having piously considered and carefully examined before God all these motives, we, the bishops of France, confidently approach Your Holiness, to lay at Your feet our humble petition, that Saint Vincent de Paul be declared by Your supreme authority the patron of all charitable societies and works.

"The present time is fraught with peril; faith is everywhere assailed by error; the Church is the object of violence and treachery, and the corruption of the age threatens the complete destruction of Christian morality. We confidently hope that Saint Vincent will come to our aid; that the crowning of his memory with a new glory will be a lesson to all, as well to society as to individuals, that the only science of salvation lies in the knowledge of the one true God and His Son Jesus Christ whom He hath sent into the world. Saint Vincent, ever united to God, ever filled with sweetness for his fellow-men, ever simple, upright, humble, and self-possessed, despising riches and honours, holding the delights of this world in horror, was never tired of repeating that he rejoiced in nothing except in Jesus Christ, whom he endeavoured to imitate in all his actions.

"Humbly prostrate at the feet of Your Holiness, we beg Your apostolic benediction for ourselves, and for the clergy and people confided to our care."

The Superior-General of the Vincentians wrote to the Sovereign Pontiff at the same time :—

"MOST HOLY FATHER,—It has come to my knowledge that the right reverend and illustrious bishops of France, with His Eminence the right reverend Cardinal Guibert at their head, beseech Your Holiness to declare by your supreme authority

Saint Vincent de Paul patron of all charitable associations and works, without any prejudice whatsoever to the dignity and honour of special patrons.

"I, too, in spite of my unworthiness, approach Your Holiness, on the advice of the most eminent and reverend Cardinal Archbishop of Paris, in the name of the bishops and vicars-apostolic of our Congregation, in the name of the members of the same Congregation of the Mission, and in that of the Sisters of Charity, whose filial love of their holy founder is well known to me. As their representative I unite my most humble and respectful supplications that Your Holiness may deign to lend a favourable ear to our petition. I presume to present it to You after the example of the most illustrious and reverend bishops of France, and beg You to grant this new glory to Saint Vincent de Paul.

"Humbly prostrate at the feet of Your Holiness, I beg Your apostolic benediction for myself and for the double family of Saint Vincent.

"I am, Your Holiness's most humble and devoted son,

"A. FIAT,  
"Superior-General.

"*March, 1883.*"

The Jesuits and the Priests of the Foreign Missions—those two great families who are also engaged in the works of the Mission—supported the petition of the Vincentians.

*Petition of the Very Reverend Father Beckx, General of the Jesuits, to the Sovereign Pontiff.*

"MOST HOLY FATHER,—Saint Vincent de Paul seems to have been destined by God to be, in the evil days in which we live, the model and guide of charity towards the poor. He relieved all kinds of distress, and left, as zealous heirs of his spirit, his priests of the Congregation of the Mission and his society of Sisters of Charity, whose eulogium would here be superfluous, for the apostolic zeal of the former and the evangelical charity of the latter shine forth throughout the entire world.

"Even among the laity there are men who, filled with his spirit and confident in his protection, have undertaken admirable works for the relief of the poor and sick. The first place amongst such associates must be given to that known as the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, which, though founded but half a century ago, is now spread all over the world, surpassing in its development the most sanguine expectations. It is a really salutary

institution, preserving the faith of the rich by charity, and whilst supplying the poor with corporal nourishment, teaches them to venerate and love the fatherly goodness of God, reflected in a measure on earth by the rich and powerful. Moreover, it knits together the separated portions of the robe of Jesus Christ, by uniting the poor and rich with the now almost severed cords of brotherly union. Thus it renders an invaluable service even to civil society, whilst it adds a magnificent jewel to the Church's crown.

"It is, therefore, most just that the members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul should celebrate with joy the fiftieth anniversary of their foundation : a joy well earned by these brave soldiers, who ask not for rest, but for the apostolic benediction as an incitement to still greater efforts. Hence they beg that triumphal honours may be conferred on their general, Saint Vincent de Paul, and that he may be declared patron of all charitable works and associations. They do not solicit a mere honorary title, one without value or utility ; no, for their petition is fraught with meaning, and comes at a most opportune moment.

"Whilst the enemies of the Church have commanders for each of their criminal cohorts, to whom they render homage, the faithful soldiers of Jesus Christ should not be without leaders beneath whose standards they may bravely fight. Now the important point in this great fight that is being waged around us is the interests of the poor, and these interests will be either entirely compromised by open violence or they will be safeguarded by Christian charity.

"Urged on by the consideration of the immense utility that would accrue to the Catholic world if this petition were granted, and most eager to seize an opportunity of showing how much I am devoted to Saint Vincent de Paul and to his children, in my own name and in that of the most reverend vicars-apostolic who rule over the missions of the Society of Jesus in heathen lands, and whose interpreter I now become, I lay at the feet of Your Holiness my humble supplications, that You may be pleased to proclaim Saint Vincent de Paul patron of all charitable works and associations.

"Most humbly prostrate at the feet of Your Holiness, I beg to implore the apostolic benediction.

"Your Holiness's most humble and obedient son,

"PETER BECKX,

*"General of the Society of Jesus."*

"Given at Fiesole, *March 27, 1883.*"

*Petition of the Superior and Directors of the Foreign Missions in Paris.*

“MOST HOLY FATHER,—The superior and directors of the Seminary of Foreign Missions at Paris, prostrate at the feet of Your Holiness, and uniting their most humble prayers to the petition of the Bishops of France, earnestly and humbly beseech, in the name of their entire Congregation, that St. Vincent de Paul be declared by apostolic authority patron of all charitable societies and works. If Your Holiness will be pleased to look with favour on the expression of our wishes, and deem it opportune to grant this new patronage, the thirty bishops and seven hundred priests of our Congregation of the Foreign Missions, spread all over Eastern Asia, where they labour to propagate the Christian religion, will most joyfully welcome this new honour awarded to Saint Vincent. They will most gladly take care that all charitable associations in their provinces, founded in the past, or that may be founded in the future, will look up to and honour as their patron and protector this great saint whose heart was filled with the mercy of the Lord, and who zealously devoted his whole life to the maintenance and propagation of pious associations having for their object the relief of all kinds of corporal and spiritual infirmities.

“We beseech Almighty God, Most Holy Father, to preserve Your Holiness during a long and prosperous life, that You may watch over the flock of Our Lord, and that He may at length, after these troubled times, grant to His Church a period of consolation and of peace.”

Whilst these petitions were being examined in Rome, the members of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul were making preparations for their golden jubilee.

The Bulletin of the Society thus reports the proceedings of May 8th, 1883:—

“Long before eight o’clock the members were filling the choir of the Chapel of the Vincentians, where the tomb of Saint Vincent de Paul was opened, as it is on great festivals.

“At the appointed hour the Superior-General of the Vincentians ascended the altar and celebrated Mass.

“All approached the holy table, and on the eve of separation they again wished to be joined together, by the participation of the same Eucharistic banquet, in a union of faith and zeal.

“Mass being over, the members of the general council and the presidents of superior councils paid their respects to the Superior-

General. In the meantime, the members venerated the sacred remains of their holy patron, which had been exposed above the altar. They then withdrew to the hall of relics, where, besides the many souvenirs of Saint Vincent and other confessors of the faith, they were shown many beautiful and pious works of art.

“At two o’clock our members met in the great hall of the Catholic Institute, and the sitting was about to begin, when the announcement of the arrival of Cardinal Guibert produced the greatest surprise and pleasure. Everbody stood up and bowed with feelings of the deepest respect and emotion for the blessing of the venerable Cardinal. His Eminence, then addressing the meeting, spoke as follows :—

“My dear friends, I have been asking myself how I could spend a few moments in your midst, on this happy occasion of the celebration of your golden jubilee. I was among you in the cathedral, and the sight of that great and solemn assembly afforded me the liveliest joy. There are very few assemblies of any kind, political, scientific, or literary, that could present such a sight as that which was witnessed last Sunday. Nevertheless, I said to myself : If I could only say a few words to them, if I could only pour forth the feelings of my heart ! I could not do so in the vast church of Notre-Dame, for I have not the strength and vigour I had forty years ago, when I first began to be engaged in the work of your Society.

“On the other hand, I could not go to your reunions—to your banquets, for example. Cardinals, you know, are supposed to have spiritual bodies—(laughter).

“I said to myself : Shall I allow all these gentlemen to depart without meeting them ? There are some whom I have the happiness of meeting frequently ; but the Belgians, the Swiss, the Italians, the Germans, the English-speaking delegates, it would be a great pleasure for me to meet them even once. Now here I have at length the opportunity of gratifying my wish.

“You have been informed that my venerable colleagues, the bishops of France, lately joined me in petitioning the Holy See to grant to your patron, Saint Vincent de Paul, the favour already accorded to Saint Thomas in another sphere, and to declare him patron of all French charitable works and associations. Before officially presenting our petition to the Holy See, I thought it would be well to know the Holy Father’s opinion, for in Church matters one must not do anything rashly. I was anxious to know whether our petition might not seem to ask too much, or be at

variance with that wisdom which is so characteristic of the Church.

““In reply I was told that it would by no means be indiscreet to present it, especially if we confined our wishes to France. If there were other countries desiring to have Saint Vincent de Paul as the patron of their works, they could also petition.

““I scarcely expected that the matter would be concluded so quickly, because petitions generally have to pass through many hands.””

His Eminence then told the assembly that His Holiness, in his desire to please our Society, had summoned Cardinal Bartolini, and told him that it was not his intention to await the decisions of the meetings of the Congregation, but that he would himself, *proprio motu*, immediately determine on a report. His eminence Cardinal Bartolini, on his side, hastened to do what was in his power with regard to the Holy Father's determination, so that the report might be issued whilst the members of the Society were still together. Cardinal Guibert then read a despatch he had received the previous evening :—

“MOST EMINENT AND REVEREND LORD,—I am most happy to be able to inform Your Eminence by telegram, that the Holy Father, without referring the matter to a special Congregation, but on the report made to Himself, has been graciously pleased to accede to the desire expressed in Your Lordship's petition and in that of the French bishops, by declaring that the illustrious benefactor of humanity, Saint Vincent de Paul, shall be recognised and venerated throughout the whole of France as the patron of all pious associations and works of Christian charity. I hasten to inform Your Eminence, in order that you may be able to announce to the delegates of the Society now assembled in Paris, the solemn act whereby the Holy See crowns with a new aureola of glory the hero of charity, the splendour of whose sanctity illumines France and the whole Catholic world. In a few days Your Eminence will receive the formal decree of the apostolic brief which His Holiness has ordered to be drawn up, so that the favour he has granted may be immediately carried into effect. . . .

“Your Eminence's most humble and devoted servant,

“✠ DOMINIC, CARDINAL BARTOLINI,

“*Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Rites.*

“ROME, 3rd May, 1883.”



It was not long before the decree of the Sacred Congregation of Rites was drawn up. The following is its tenor :—

*Decree of the Sacred Congregation of Rites proclaiming Saint Vincent de Paul Patron of all Charitable Conferences and Societies established in France.*

“Divine Providence gave Saint Vincent de Paul to the world as a noble model of mercy towards the poor, and as an illustrious leader destined to spread the works of Christian charity far and wide. For this end, making himself all to all, he excelled in doing good, and left his spirit as a heritage to his Priests of the Congregation of the Mission and to the Sisters of Charity.

“In later times a large number of the laity associating themselves with these priests and sisters, inspired with similar sentiments of benevolence, and strengthened by the courage of Saint Vincent, have fearlessly undertaken admirable works of mercy, spiritual as well as corporal, without ever shrinking before fatigue, difficulties, or expense. Thus the Conference or Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, founded in Paris in the year 1833, has spread in a wonderful manner to almost all parts of the world where the Church has children, and has brought forth salutary fruits in abundance.

“It is for this reason that the members of this Society intending to celebrate in the near future the fiftieth anniversary of their foundation, have expressed a desire that Saint Vincent, hitherto recognised by their own choice as their master and protector, should be decreed and proclaimed their heavenly patron by the authority of the Apostolic See. The most reverend bishops of France, entirely coinciding with this idea, have solicited the same favour from Our Holy Father, Pope Leo XIII., in favour of all such charitable societies established in France. His Holiness, on the report of the undersigned secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, graciously receiving these prayers and petitions, has been pleased to decree and proclaim Saint Vincent de Paul special patron with God of all charitable societies in France that have any connection with him whatsoever; and he has consequently commanded that Apostolic Letters in the form of a brief should be drawn up on this subject.

“✠ DOMINIC, CARDINAL BARTOLINI,

“*Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Rites.*

“LAURENCE SALVATI,

“*Secretary.*

“*April 26th, 1883.*”

On the 22nd of June following a pontifical brief was published, solemnly conferring on Saint Vincent de Paul the title of patron of charitable societies in France.

### BRIEF OF THE SOVEREIGN PONTIFF.

“LEO XIII., Pope.

“For a perpetual remembrance.

“To glorify the name and implore the patronage of those Christian heroes whom the charity of Christ alone could beget, and whom the cold and heartless philosophy of the world could never produce, seems to us to be a most useful task. Urged by such illustrious examples, many noble souls have, at the expense of their own interests, generously devoted their lives to the service of their neighbour. Now among these heroes there is not one more beloved, not one who merits more from all classes of society than Saint Vincent de Paul. Hence it is with feelings of the deepest joy that We have learnt of the solemnities lately celebrated in his honour by Catholics assembled in Paris. Inspired by Christian faith, his ardent charity sent forth its rays to God, thence to be reflected on men ; for being unable to give aught to God, who possesseth all good things in Himself, his charity spent itself on the poor, who are God’s children. This is especially remarkable in the work established by him in Paris, and known under the name of the Institute of Charity.

“The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, electing to walk in his footsteps, while celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of its foundation, presented to Us an humble petition to appoint as its patron Saint Vincent, whom it already has naturally regarded as its guide and protector. Our beloved sons the bishops of France have with a like eagerness presented a petition to the same effect. Wherefore, in compliance with these wishes, and with the desire of exciting the devotion of the faithful towards this hero of charity, We hereby constitute and declare, by the tenor of these presents, Saint Vincent de Paul, special patron, with God, of all charitable associations emanating from him in any manner whatsoever, and established on French territory.

“We furthermore decree that these letters be regarded as official and valid, henceforth obtaining full and complete effect, and that their authority be absolute now and for all time, notwithstanding all constitutions, decrees and other apostolic acts

to the contrary. It is also Our will that fac-similes of these presents, even printed copies, signed by a public notary and furnished with the seal of a person constituted in ecclesiastical dignity, be accorded the same credence as these presents themselves.

“Given at Rome, near Saint Peter’s, under the seal of the Fisherman, June 22nd, 1883, in the sixth year of Our pontificate.

*For* CARDINAL MERTEL,

A. TRINIHIERI (*Substitute*).

“Thus it is that God ever exalts the humble, and renders fruitful the labours of those who, knowing what they are, despise and condemn themselves. When He desires to arouse the sleeping world, unconscious of the dangers that threaten it, He calls not on the great, the powerful, or the rich ; no, one poor aged priest suffices to manifest His designs. In order that His divine action may be yet more striking, He fills his soul with such sentiments of humility that he is ever fearful of himself ; and it is only long afterwards, from the depths of his tomb transformed into an altar, that he can at length see the greatness, beauty and divine providence of the works that sprang from his mind and heart.

“How beautiful is the Church of France surrounded by her reformed clergy, the fruit of the seminaries, by her religious strengthened and ennobled by persecution, by her pure and courageous Sisters of Charity, and by that multitude of good works animated by the spirit of Saint Vincent de Paul ! What can avail against her ? Persecute her priests ! They will come forth ennobled from the furnace of tribulation. Shut up her hospitals and schools, banish her religious, expel her Sisters of Charity ! Their absence eloquently proves their loss. O Father ! bless them, and render them invincible by thy spirit.”<sup>1</sup>

The pontifical brief declaring Saint Vincent de Paul patron of the charitable works and associations of France excited a universal desire of having this favour extended to other Catholic countries, and thus Ireland, the United States, Portugal, Belgium, Switzerland and Austria sought the same favour. The Spanish clergy, headed by Cardinal Moréno, Patriarch of the Indies, signed a petition for that end ; Brazil and Central America re-echoed the cry of Europe and the United States ; the Archbishops of Bahia and Quito, the Patriarchs of Jerusalem and of the Armenian

<sup>1</sup> Mgr. Bougaud.

Catholics likewise petitioned. We shall give a few letters, merely to show the unanimity of the movement :—

*Letter of Monseigneur Azarian, Patriarch of Cilicia,  
to Father Fiat, Superior-General.*

“CONSTANTINOPLE, *November 13th, 1883.*

“MOST REVEREND FATHER,—I have just received your esteemed communication of the 18th ult. I am happy to learn from you what I have already heard, namely, that our Holy Father, Pope Leo XIII., yielding to the petition of their lordships the bishops of your great country, has proclaimed the venerable Saint Vincent de Paul patron of all charitable works and institutions in France. In truth, these establishments work no less wonders in our Eastern countries than they do at home.

“I shall most willingly participate in the expression of this desire of the Catholic episcopate, and the fulfilment of my request will be a source of the greatest consolation both to myself and to my community in general, and this all the more on account of the long-established relations we have had with the children of this great saint, the true model of Christian charity and zeal for the propagation of the faith and the salvation of souls.

Be pleased to accept my most respectful regards and best wishes, with my patriarchal blessing on yourself and your two families.

“I am, yours devotedly in our Lord Jesus Christ,

“✠ STEPHEN PETER AZARIAN,  
“*Patriarch of Cilicia.*”

*Letter of the Patriarch of Jerusalem.*

“JERUSALEM, *November 28th, 1883.*

“MOST REVEREND FATHER,—I entirely concur in your views as to the opportuneness of extending to the entire Catholic world the patronage of Saint Vincent de Paul over all charitable works, and shall be only too happy to do all in my power to obtain this most desirable favour. Yet I cannot but tell you the little I can do, seeing that I can give only one vote, as I have no suffragans. In my opinion this would be an excellent means of arriving at the desired end : first of all to collect the signatures of the bishops of some provinces or kingdoms ; then let you yourself draw up a petition to be sent to bishops all over the Catholic world. I, for

my part, shall be most happy to sign it. I am, moreover, thoroughly convinced that our Holy Father the Pope, at the sight of such a manifestation of the wishes of the Catholic episcopate, will be most happy to extend to the whole world the patronage of your saint over all charitable works. Be pleased to accept the assurance of my most respectful regards, and believe me to be, yours devotedly in our Lord,

“✱ VINCENT,”

“*Patriarch of Jerusalem.*”

*Letter of the Archbishop of Quito.*

“QUITO, December 29th, 1883.

“REVEREND FATHER,—The letter in which you inform me of the new honour with which the Holy See has just glorified Saint Vincent de Paul has been a source of the greatest consolation to me. As I am desirous of co-operating in extending throughout the world the glory of this great saint, whom we may well regard as the great organiser of charitable works, I have requested all the suffragan bishops of my province to kindly unite with me, so that we may with one voice present our heartfelt petitions to the Holy Father, to proclaim Saint Vincent de Paul universal patron of all charitable works and institutions at present in existence, or which may afterwards be established throughout the world.

“The Republic of Ecuador has already derived many precious advantages from the charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, by the zealous labours of the Priests of the Mission in seminaries, and of the Sisters of Charity in the hospitals, hospices, schools, and orphanages confided to their care. I have not the slightest doubt, therefore, that all the bishops of the Equatorial Ecclesiastical Province will be most happy in uniting to petition the Holy See to add one more jewel to the brilliant and immortal crown of the Father and Patron of Charity.

“Be pleased to accept, Most Reverend Father, the expression of my sincere affection and good-will for the Priests of the Mission and the Sisters of Charity, together with the testimony of esteem and respect with which I have the honour to subscribe myself, Most Reverend Father,—Your devoted servant,

“✱ JOSEPH IGNATIUS,

“*Archbishop of Quito.*”

*Letter of the Archbishop of Bahia.*

“BAHIA (BRAZIL), *January 11th*, 1884.

“MOST REVEREND FATHER,—I received your letter of the 18th of October, and entirely agree with all that you say regarding Saint Vincent de Paul. Yes, Brazil too desires the favour of having Saint Vincent as patron of all its charitable works. My diocese, in particular, is much indebted to the admirable institutions of this great protector of suffering humanity. I am most happy to inform you that I have just now written to our Holy Father, Pope Leo XIII., on this subject.

“Kindly accept, Most Reverend Father, the expression of my entire devotedness in our Lord.—Your humble servant,

“✠ LOUIS,  
“*Archbishop of Bahia.*”

*Petition of the Irish Bishops*

“MOST HOLY FATHER,—We, the undersigned, the archbishops and bishops of Ireland, filled with veneration for the great Saint Vincent de Paul, justly styled the apostle of charity, and desiring to manifest our gratitude, in the first place, to his sons, the Priests of the Congregation of the Mission, whom Saint Vincent himself first sent into Ireland under the auspices of Your venerable predecessor Innocent X., and whose labours from that time until our own have not ceased to yield the most abundant fruits; in the second place, to his spiritual daughters, the Sisters of Charity; and lastly, to those lay associations which, under the name and patronage of this great saint, so effectually co-operate with the clergy for the corporal and spiritual relief and comfort of Christian peoples. Inspired, moreover, with an ardent desire of encouraging and extending, in these troubled times, not only amongst ourselves, but throughout the whole world, works of charity, the ornament and glory of the Catholic Church, we unite our most humble prayers and petitions to those already expressed by the bishops of France to Your Holiness, that it may please You to declare Saint Vincent de Paul patron of all charitable works and societies established throughout the Universal Church.

“Prostrate at the feet of Your Holiness, we humbly implore the apostolic benediction for ourselves, the clergy and people confided to our care.

“We are, Most Holy Father, Your most humble and devoted servants.” [The signatures follow].

It may well be imagined that Leo XIII. was not indifferent to these earnest entreaties, and on June 13, 1885, a circular of the Very Reverend Father Fiat announced to the two families of Saint Vincent—the Priests of the Mission and the Sisters of Charity—the new honour that had just been decreed to their glorious founder. On the report of Cardinal Laurenzi, the Sacred Congregation of Rites, by a decree dated April 16, 1885, declared Saint Vincent de Paul patron in the entire Catholic Church of all charitable associations directly or indirectly emanating from him. These documents pay too high a tribute to the virtues of Saint Vincent de Paul for us to omit them here.

### URBIS ET ORBIS

*Report made to the General Congregation, March 28, 1885, on the  
Concession of the Patronage of Saint Vincent de Paul.*

“The favour that has been solicited by three hundred and ninety-three venerable bishops and prelates of the Holy Church, and by five superiors-general of religious congregations, namely, that Saint Vincent de Paul be declared universal patron of all Catholic works of charity that owe their origin to him, has already been granted for all French territory, on the occasion of the golden jubilee of the *lay conferences or Society of Saint Vincent de Paul*, by the reigning Sovereign Pontiff, Leo XIII., in a brief registered under the title, *Christianos heroas*, dated June 22, 1883. Again, by a decree of this Sacred Congregation of December 23, 1884, the same favour was granted to all the dioceses of Ireland.

“There is question now of extending this honour and patronage to the entire Catholic world.

“At first sight this objection might be made: why grant a universal patronage over all charitable works and establishments to a modern saint who has not been canonised more than a century and a half, seeing that the Catholic Church has venerated and venerates upon her altars so many other Christian heroes, who, though more ancient, are not less illustrious and highly renowned for the practice of Christian charity, and who have rendered manifold services to religion and civil society, by their works during life, and even after their death, through their wise and beneficent institutions? To settle this difficulty, the undersigned is of opinion that without instituting any comparison between the saints, so numerous and so glorious, who have

signalised themselves in the exercise of works of mercy, it will be sufficient to set down briefly the special and characteristic claims of the charity of Saint Vincent de Paul. These claims, which may be reduced to six, give a special and a quite distinctive character to his charity in the eyes of the Church and the world.

“We may point out, in the first place, that admirable art which he bequeathed to his disciples and which he impressed like a seal on all his institutions—the art of using corporal and exterior works of charity to gain souls to God, to purify them, and to elevate the moral tone and standard of society. — ‘*Servus Dei*’ (these are the words of Clement XII. in his Bull of Canonisation, *Superna Hierusalem*, dated June 16, 1737), ‘*perfecta ardens charitate . . . . agebat quantum poterat ut proximus salvus corpore salvusque animo esset, ita tamen ut omnem corporum curam ad salutem animarum de qua potissima debet esse sollicitudo referret.*’

“Secondly, we may point out the truly marvellous multiplicity of charitable works which he undertook and to which he devoted his life, ever keeping in mind this twofold end : to relieve his fellow-man in all sorts of temporal needs, that he might thus ameliorate his moral and religious well-being. The associations he founded or reformed are conspicuous in the annals of the Church for their lofty ends and their abundant fruits of salvation : the *Priests of the Mission*, destined for the education and reform of the clergy, as well as for the evangelisation of the poor, the ignorant, and the inhabitants of rural districts ; the *Sisters of Charity*, to serve the sick, the poor, the foundlings, the aged—in fact, all classes of destitute persons ; the *Ladies of Charity*, destined in cities to assist in hospitals or in rural districts in the homes of the sick poor ; the *Sisters of the Cross*, of *Divine Providence*, and of *Saint Genevieve*, for the education and training of poor girls, the protection of those in danger, and the care of abandoned females.

“The foundation of so many hospitals and asylums which he organised and firmly established with extraordinary rapidity, and which were intended for the reception of foundlings, slaves, lunatics, prisoners, penitents, sailors, wayfarers, and disabled artisans are truly marvellous works, and evoked this eulogium from the Church :—‘*Nullum fuit calamitatis genus cui paterne non occurrerit ;*’ and in the Bull of Canonisation Clement XII. has well said : ‘*Dei servus Vincentius erat veluti omnium egentium et miserorum perfugium, et cujusvis generis pauperes. . . ita largis sublevabat eleemosynis ut communiter pauperum pater nuncuparetur.*’



“Thirdly, another splendid characteristic of Saint Vincent de Paul is that he has not only been an active founder, but also an illustrious master and wise legislator in the administration of charitable affairs as well as in the art of directing corporal works of mercy to the salvation of souls. This is especially conspicuous in the prudent directions and advice he has laid down in the rules of the Priests of the Congregation of the Mission and in those of the Sisters of Charity, as also in the judicious statutes and regulations by means of which he established or reformed many charitable asylums and establishments, especially in Paris.

“But this science of God combined with those eminent powers of administration were especially noteworthy and remarkable in his choice of means ; for with singularly acute discernment he knew how to combat an unbelieving and corrupted world by those exterior and heroic works of Christian charity which the world itself, with all its philosophical philanthropy, could never produce. His heavenly wisdom and genius shone resplendent in discovering the secret of uniting and associating in the public exercise of charity, persons of the world of both sexes, and of employing all grades of society, by means of parish confraternities and many other pious associations, in spreading the benefits of Christian charity in all directions. It shines forth in those spiritual exercises and truly valuable instructions which he has furnished for the personal sanctification of all those who, under his banner, devote themselves to works of charity, in the midst of the world and in contact with evil persons, in such a manner that, before God, they have the merit of their works without being sullied by the wickedness of the world or the breath of vice.

“A fourth characteristic of the institutions of Saint Vincent is their wonderfully rapid propagation, so great that there is no country to-day, however unexplored or savage, where his name is not known, or where there has not been felt, through the agency of his courageous sons and noble-hearted daughters, the beneficial influence of Christian charity.

“In the fifth place we find another characteristic glory of this great apostle of charity, in the fecundity of his spirit and its power of expansion. This splendid eulogy is to be found in the Bull of Canonisation : ‘*Et quoniam charitas mensuram non habet, servi Dei virtus Galliarum terminis restricta non est. . . . In remotis provinciis animarum salutem expetens, corporum etiam egestatibus consulere non omittebat, at per temporalia subsidia carnales homines ad Deum attraheret.*’ All institutions since his time that have

devoted themselves to works of charity have been modelled according to his views and illustrious examples, and many put themselves at once under his guidance and heavenly patronage ; for he has been in the eyes of all, the great model of a legislator and organiser of charitable works. It would be difficult to enumerate all the benevolent associations that have sprung from this rich and fruitful source, of which our age is so proud, and to which the Church's enemies are forced to pay the tribute of their admiration ; for very often they are compelled, in times of danger and calamity, to appeal to their devotedness for services the most laborious and heroic. The Sisters Hospitallers of Charity, the Sisters of Providence, the Sisters of Compassion, the Sisters of Saint Vincent, the Priests of Saint Vincent, the Brothers of Mercy, have all flowed from this source.

“ But we must here make special mention of the incomparable work of the lay conferences known as the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. Humble in its origin, it was founded in Paris in 1833, by the illustrious Ozanam. It has been warmly recommended and enriched with spiritual treasures by two Sovereign Pontiffs, Gregory XVI. and Pius IX. ; and in a few years it has multiplied and spread so rapidly that it is to be found wherever there is a Catholic community, even in the most distant lands. Its valiant associates fill themselves with the spirit of their illustrious master, Saint Vincent ; they learn from him his own characteristic science and art—how to spread far and wide the benefits of true Christian charity, how to introduce them into the homes and haunts of the afflicted, how to multiply them for the relief of all classes of the poor, and how to apply them so as to lead to the moral well-being of the recipient and of civil society itself. It cannot be doubted that it was upon this great model that those generous priests formed themselves who quite recently met at Paris in an ecclesiastical conference under the name and patronage of Saint Vincent, with the object of entirely devoting themselves to the service and succour of the poor working classes, exposed to so many dangers at the present time.

“ We may point out in the last place a very special quality (and one to be highly appreciated in our own days) of Saint Vincent's charity, viz., the salutary effect and preservative power of its examples and institutions against the contagion of secret societies. It may even be said that it is not only an antidote against, but a powerful corrective of, the ravages caused by such societies. Accordingly we find these institutions mentioned expressly among the works recommended by the Sovereign Pontiff, Leo XIII.,

in his remarkable encyclical, *Humanum genus de secta massonum*, dated April 13, 1884.

“Finally, Christian charity, if practised according to the spirit of Saint Vincent, with a sweet simplicity, a tender affection for our neighbour, a generous liberality towards all sorts of misery and calamity, establishes a kindly relation between the classes and the masses, between the rich and the poor. Ever on the watch for the spiritual amelioration of those whom it assists, whilst providing them with temporal assistance, it soothes their wounds with the healing balm of religion, and by adding thereto the teaching of the Catechism, affords them the advantages of Christian practices with the fruits of brotherly love. Thus does Christian charity preserve the simple and ignorant from the traps and pitfalls of anti-religious and anti-social societies, and facilitates the return of those who have had the misfortune of being caught in their snares. The task is difficult ; but in our days it is of the utmost necessity to oppose a barrier to the underhand dealings and conspiracies of those societies whose ultimate end is the complete overthrow of social and religious order. Now the numerous and flourishing associations that owe their origin to Saint Vincent de Paul are strenuously labouring with persevering industry at this important task, under the auspices and protection of his glorious patronage. These associations, by their fruitful works of charity, are in the eyes of the Church deserving of the highest praise and honour, since they afford a striking proof to the infidel, to the ignorant, and even to our bitterest enemies, of that divine virtue and superiority of the Catholic religion wherever it finds itself face to face with heterodox propagandas or free-thinking societies, however powerfully supported and richly endowed they may be.

“The petition addressed to the Holy Father, and supported by the signatures of so many illustrious prelates, the witnesses of and co-operators in the marvellous fruits produced throughout the Christian world by the institutions of Saint Vincent de Paul, seems to the undersigned to have the most legitimate titles to a favourable reception ; and this, first on account of the above-mentioned prerogatives, which are so remarkable in the works and associations of the illustrious apostle of charity ; secondly, because it may lead to a still greater development and growth of these same works and pious associations ; and finally, because it will serve to incite his generous sons and noble-hearted daughters to still greater efforts, so that all other associations that walk in his footsteps and under his heavenly patronage may zealously

labour for the salvation of their neighbour against the corruption of the age, with as much benefit to souls as glory to the Catholic Church.

“These are the reasons that lead the undersigned to the opinion that if such be the pleasure of the Holy Assembly, they may reply to the petition according to the formula : ‘ *Consulendum Sanctissimo pro gratia si ita,*’ &c.

“CHARLES, CARDINAL LAURENZI.”

*Decree of the Sacred Congregation of Rites.*

ORBIS.

“Ever desirous of enkindling the zeal of the faithful for those works of Christian charity that owe their origin to Saint Vincent de Paul, and wishing to augment the glory of such an illustrious Father and Master ; yielding, moreover, to the prayers addressed to him two years ago, by the members of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul on the occasion of its golden jubilee in Paris, as also to the wishes of the right reverend bishops of France, the Sovereign Pontiff, by virtue of his apostolic authority, declared and constituted Saint Vincent de Paul special patron with God of all charitable associations in France owing their origin to him in any manner whatsoever.

“Many cardinals of the Holy Roman Church, as well as a great number of venerable bishops from all parts of the world, and several superiors-general of religious Congregations, presented their earnest petitions to the Sovereign Pontiff that the decree granted last year to dioceses of Ireland should now be extended to all societies and works of the same nature throughout the entire Catholic world. Our Holy Father, Pope Leo XIII., received them favourably, and transmitted them to the right reverend and eminent cardinals of the Congregation of Rites, that they might give him their advice on the question. Now this Sacred Congregation, at an ordinary meeting held in the Vatican, March 28, 1885, on the report of the Right Reverend and Eminent Cardinal, Charles Laurenzi, and having also heard attentively the Reverend Father Dom Augustin Caprara, promoter of the holy faith, when everything had been maturely examined, replied to the petition of so many illustrious prelates : *Cousulendum Sanctissimo pro gratia.* A faithful account of all these proceedings having been laid before our Holy Father by the undersigned

secretary, His Holiness was pleased to entirely confirm and approve the decision of the Sacred Congregation. He furthermore declared and constituted, with all the honours due to heavenly protectors, Saint Vincent de Paul special Patron with God of all charitable associations existing throughout the Catholic world, and which emanate from him in any manner whatsoever ; and ordered apostolic letters to be prepared in the form of a brief.

“ D. CARDINAL BARTOLINI,

*“ Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Rites.*

*“ April 10th of the same year, 1885.*

(✱ Seal)

LAWRENCE SALVATI,

*“ Secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Rites.*

“ OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

OF BRIEFS, *May 2nd, 1885.*”

### BRIEF OF LEO XIII., POPE.

“ For perpetual remembrance.

“ Our Lord Jesus Christ gave many commandments to the human race, that by their observance men might be led in safety unto life eternal ; but there was one which He often repeated, and on which He ever insisted, that of loving our neighbour as ourselves. He, who is charity itself, taught us that charity is the foundation whereon the whole law rests, and a sign whereby the disciples of Christian wisdom might be distinguished from other men. It is no wonder then that the noble virtue of preferring others to ourselves, the mother and nurse of all other virtues, should be found deep in the hearts of those who, walking in the footsteps of their Divine Master, have striven to reach the summit of Christian perfection. In the foremost rank of these, by the lustre of his virtue, stands out Saint Vincent de Paul, the great and immortal model of Christian charity. He left no misery unassuaged by his marvellous charity ; he embraced every labour for the relief and advantage of his fellow-men.

“ When Vincent had departed this life to ascend into heaven, the source of the works instituted by him was by no means dried up. It still flows freely and abundantly, in numerous channels, to water the fields of the Church. For this most holy man not

only strenuously exerted himself in the practice of charity, but induced very many to imitate him. Some he formed to the practices of a religious life under a common rule, whilst others he enrolled in pious associations to which he gave the most prudent counsel and direction. The abundant fruits that society receives from them may easily be seen ; for his Congregations, though not yet two centuries in existence, are spread throughout almost all parts of the world, and everywhere excite that admiration which is so justly due to them. It is well known that Saint Vincent's disciples are ever ready to comfort the afflicted ; that they are to be met with everywhere, in hospitals, prisons, schools, nay, even on the battlefield, ever fulfilling the duties of charity towards body and soul. Hence it is that Our predecessors have ever honoured and regarded with feelings of special tenderness the Congregations and Associations of Saint Vincent de Paul, as well as all those other charitable societies which, without bearing his name, have nevertheless sprung from him as from their source. Following their example, in Our desire that all those associations might drink more deeply of the spirit of their founder and father, and especially at the request of the bishops of France, we have already declared and constituted Saint Vincent de Paul heavenly patron of the above-mentioned societies existing in France. This decree was last year extended to the dioceses of Ireland at the pious request of their bishops.

“ Finally, many cardinals of the Holy Roman Church and bishops from almost all parts of the world, as well as the superiors-general of religious Congregations, have begged Us to graciously extend this decree to all those Catholic countries in which societies and works of the same nature are to be found. After having taken the advice of the cardinals of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, We have decided to lend a favourable ear to these petitions.

“ Wherefore, desirous of contributing to the welfare of the Universal Church, of augmenting the glory of God, and exciting in all hearts zeal and charity towards the neighbour, We, by virtue of Our apostolic authority, declare and constitute by these letters, Saint Vincent de Paul special patron with God of all charitable associations existing throughout the Catholic world and emanating from him in any way whatsoever, and We decree that all the honours due to heavenly patrons be rendered to him.

“ We furthermore decree that these presents are and shall be considered efficient, valid and authentic, henceforth obtaining their full and entire effect, and that their authority be absolute

for the present and for the future, and this notwithstanding all constitutions, decrees, or other apostolic acts to the contrary. We moreover desire that copies of these presents, provided they be sealed by an ecclesiastical dignitary, obtain the same credence as that accorded to the original.

“Given at Rome, near Saint Peter’s, under the seal of the Fisherman, May 12th, 1885, the eighth year of Our pontificate.

(L. ✱ S.) “M. CARDINAL LEDOCKOWSKI.

We may imagine what enthusiasm these new honours accorded to Saint Vincent aroused in all hearts. The whole world once more rejoiced in the glory of the saint. Triduum were celebrated in Rome, Paris, in the East, and in America. The details of them would be full of consolation, but we must finish.

As we lay down our pen we exclaim from the depths of our heart: “*Mirabilis Deus in sanctis suis*—God is wonderful in His saints.” He raises them up and glorifies them when and where He pleases. He raised up Vincent de Paul in the seventeenth century after doctrinal science had played its part in the battle against the Reformation, to give another proof of the divinity of His Church, by showing that wherever Truth is, there too is Charity. He glorifies him at the present day in a wonderful manner, because though it is no doubt by science, yet it is above all by works that, in our times especially, the Church is to reconquer the world. Nowadays, when everything, even charity itself, is being secularised, it is necessary to show by this striking and glorious example that nothing equals the love that draws its inspirations from the depths of the Sacred Heart of Love itself made man, and that no philanthropist will ever equal the disciple of Jesus Christ, who is both a philanthropist and a saint.

Of what avail, however, is our applause if our works contradict our words? Of what advantage to hold up a model, the greatest the world has ever seen, if, content with barren admiration, we proceed no further; if the name and example of Saint Vincent de Paul enkindle not in our hearts the sacred flame that consumed his own? Let us honour the saints; yes, but still more let us imitate them.

Let us follow in the footprints of Saint Vincent de Paul. Let us devote ourselves, like him, to works of charity in the service of our neighbour. There it is that we shall find our greatest source of strength in the conflicts of the present day. What have the so-called philanthropists that we have not? We have, on the

contrary, what they shall never have, the divine charity of Jesus Christ. Let us prove that, instead of dividing or opposing the powers of the human soul, we are to unite them for the regeneration of modern society ; that the Church, far from being a hindrance, is an indispensable auxiliary of progress ; and that it is now time for this benighted age to recognise that fact and return to her fold. Then shall those who are being led astray come to know where are their true friends—those who wish not to use them as tools, but to serve them for Christ's sake. Here is to be found the solution not only of the religious, but of the social problem of our day.

Men resist learning, eloquence, genius ; they yield before the works of charity, before the sweet influences of love.

E. P. M. M.







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